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Many Are Called

By the same author

Short Stories

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

THE IRON CHAIN

Novel

THE HOLLOW OF THE WAVE

EDWARD NEWHOUSE

Many Are Called

Forty-Two Short Stories

WILLIAM SLOANE ASSOCIATES
Publishers *New York*

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To ALISON OSBORN NEWHOUSE

These forty-two are about half the stories published by the writer during the years between 1939 and 1950. Thirty-nine first appeared in *The New Yorker*. The other three were originally printed in previous collections, one in ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN and two in THE IRON CHAIN. Dates of publication are given on the first page of each story.

Contents

In Edgerton

MY BROTHER'S SECOND FUNERAL 3
THE WACKY AFTERNOON 14
NEW YEAR'S DAY 26
PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE 37
THE LIGHT ACROSS THE HILL 48
THE WAR FOR TONY 56

At Jake's

NEVER TRUST A WOMAN 71
TEN YEARS ON A DESERT ISLAND 74
A GORGEOUS NUMBER 80
THE MAGIC HOUR 84
THE LEGS GO FIRST 90

At George's

A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN 99
THE REVOLUTION. 103

En Route

BILLY THE BASTARD 111
OUT WHERE THE WEST BEGINS 116
THE GIRL WHO HAD TO GET MARRIED 122

Waiting

ALL THEY DO IS TALK 129
THE DAY BEFORE 133
VACANCY IN WESTCHESTER 139
I HOPE YOU'LL UNDERSTAND 145
THE VOLCANO 156

The Captains Depart

CLOSE YOUR EYES 171
A SHORT VISIT TO NAPLES 180
THE FOUR FREEDOMS 191
IN TIME OF CALAMITY 203
IRVING 213
POSITION OF THE SOLDIER 224
POKER GAME 236
WHAT DO YOU DO? 244
PRO AND CON 254
MAJOR AND MRS. FLETCHER 265

At First the Infant

THE MENTOCRATS 279
THE EAGLE 285
THE BRONZE THING 293
SEVENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS 305
CHOICE OF WEAPONS 319
EVER BEEN TO BROOKLYN? 329
THE WOLF 333
A COUPLE OF OLD-TIMERS 338

Pull up the Ladder, Mate

TIME OUT 351
WITH MEN IT'S DIFFERENT 364
COME AGAIN ANOTHER DAY 369

In Edgerton

MY BROTHER'S SECOND FUNERAL

THE WACKY AFTERNOON

NEW YEAR'S DAY

PUT YOURSELF IN MY PLACE

THE LIGHT ACROSS THE HILL

THE WAR FOR TONY

My Brother's Second Funeral

October, 1949

Half the people in Edgerton will be at my brother's funeral tomorrow. Some of them have seen me around town these past couple of days, and they are bound to be asking each other why I'm not there. They'll probably have more sense than to ask my mother, but I wouldn't be surprised if one of my father's friends happened to say, "Where's Bob?" My father will come up with a story and he'll expect me to back him. I guess I will. All I want now is to spend a few hours with my mother after the funeral and then catch the late train out.

Riley will be buried with military honors. A squad from the Riley Greer Post of the American Legion will fire a round or two, and there'll be Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts and Brownies and firemen and ladies' auxiliaries and garden clubs and church groups, and I don't want any part of them, not tomorrow. It's decent of them to do what they're going to do. But I don't want to be there when they do it.

Last Monday, my father phoned me long distance where I work, at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles in Albany. He'd just had word that Riley's remains would be brought to Edgerton on Friday, and could I come down then and stay until the funeral on Sunday? He said there'd been a meeting about it at the Legion. The casket would be set up in the Legion Hall, and two men would stand guard by it day and night, with relief every two hours. He was pretty near out of breath. He went on and on about the arrangements—the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the ladies' auxiliaries. Everybody knew what Riley's first funeral must have been like, at Salerno, with the fighting still going on and all, and they wanted this one to be right. I said I'd come down.

But I won't go to the funeral tomorrow. I can hear some of those Legion boys now. They'll be saying, "Bob always *was* jealous of Riley. Bob never had the girls Riley had. Bob never got to go to college. Bob never got to be a lieutenant." All that will be true, except the jealous part. I was never jealous of Riley. We had our scraps and battles, but they didn't mean a thing. Riley and I were friends. He would have been my friend even if we hadn't been brothers.

There was only a year between us and we were practically the same size, so we could do everything together—stuff like building a tree house or hiking up Bear Mountain. We caught our first fish the same day and had our first dates the same night and got into our first real trouble by nudging the memorial cannon off its base. We couldn't stop it from rolling downhill, and it crashed into the door of the Edgerton National Bank. My father had to pay over a hundred dollars in damages. A lot of people said it served him right, because if it hadn't been for him, that piece of ordnance wouldn't have been there in the first place.

It's all connected up together, that cannon and the monkeyshines they'll be putting on for Riley tomorrow. If, back in '17, they had stuck my father into some infantry line outfit, it might have been another story. Instead, they went and made him a staff general's orderly, and he spent almost a year in Paris. That's what he never got over. They gave him that dog robber's job, and it's still the big thing in his life. You'll find a few men like that in every Legion post, and usually they do most of the sounding off.

I'm not old enough to remember the first fuss about the cannon, but my mother used to say it split the town right down the middle. My father and his Legion friends were all for setting it up, and Mr. Dohmler, the principal of our school, was against it. He thought if the town was bent on having a memorial, it ought to be a playground with a plaque in it or some such. He didn't like the idea of children getting interested in cannons. And he had plenty of support, too, because at that time there was a lot of feeling against war. But there was even more feeling against Germany, and Mr. Dohmler had been born there, and that's what finally licked him. So from about '24 on, all the Memorial Day parades end up at the cannon, and the Legion post commander places a wreath of flowers at the base. My father's name is on one of the plaques there, and Riley's and mine are on the other. I was in the 14th Armored.

When Riley and I were kids, we used to be proud as hell of our father marching in those parades, but after a while it got pretty embarrassing. The old man was always yelling commands down the line, and he has this real high-pitched voice that sounds queer coming from a big fat guy. He didn't use to be fat to begin with, but he got a job as a licensed weighmaster at the coal and lumber yard, and right away he started putting on the pounds. He hasn't stopped yet.

Well, every time he got out there, with his stomach bulging up under his Legion blues, Riley and I would look at each other and wish we were in some other place except Edgerton. Anybody who's been in a town where the Legion was having a convention will know what I mean. You see these old crocks in uniform, and they're leaning out of a hotel window, tossing paper bags full of water at the girls. I don't say my father ever did that, but then I've never gone to a convention with him. He might just as well do that as get out there in a Memorial Day parade sporting a dozen or more medals that aren't worth the metal they're stamped from—all these state decorations and danglers that the boys hand out to each other for being alive. As soon as Riley and I were old enough to own bikes, we used to go to Forest Valley or some other town for our Memorial Day parade. And the old man would yak at us for not showing proper respect. He never hit us or took our allowance away or anything like that. He'd just yak at us, and Riley would yak back at him. The old man took a lot of lip from Riley.

I still remember one argument they had, about Belgian babies. Riley might have been a freshman at college then. Back in the war, the old man said, the Germans used to kill Belgian babies. Riley said all that's been proved to be nothing but propaganda. And besides wasn't it true that once some Kentucky riflemen had made razorstrops from the skin off the legs of a British brigadier general? The old man wanted to know where Riley got that. So Riley came up with a book that had the story. The legs had belonged to Tecumseh, the Indian chief, and Tecumseh had held a commission as brigadier general in the British Army, sure enough. Then my father got started on the books they now give boys to read at college, and the argument took up all of a Thanksgiving dinner and on into the evening. I got into it, too—something I wouldn't do today. I don't seem to get anyplace with arguments. Maybe the Germans did kill Belgian babies and maybe they didn't. There's no argument about the Jewish babies, is there? Or the Japanese babies we got in Tokyo? Arguments are for people who know what the score is.

Riley used to be a glutton for arguments. About the time he was fifteen, he decided there was no God, so he never ran out of things to argue about. He decided he wouldn't go to church any more. My mother tried everything to budge him, and finally she had our pastor, Mr Haislip, come over to the house to see what he could do. He talked around awhile and then he put it to Riley straight. He said, "Son, why don't you believe in God?"

I thought Riley would back down for sure. Instead, he asked if God was responsible for our grandfather being in the hospital with cancer. We loved our grandfather. Riley wanted to know why, if there was a God, He allowed things like that to happen.

"It is not for us to question His ways," Mr. Haislip said. "We are not given to understand the workings of His infinite wisdom."

Riley said, "If we're not supposed to understand His ways, what's the use of you trying to explain them every Sunday?"

My mother started to cry. She was crazy about her father and she knew he didn't have long to live, but she was upset about Riley talking like that to Mr. Haislip. Riley hadn't meant to talk fresh. He was only standing up for what he believed, and Mr. Haislip kept encouraging him to ask questions. They went at it hammer and tongs about Jonah and the whale, and why, if God was all-powerful, He let the Devil go free, and stuff like that. Personally, I thought Riley had the best of it.

Riley and I had no arguments to speak of, not after we got out of high school. We saw eye to eye on most of the important things. He used to come home from college for vacations, and we'd talk into the night or go bowling or something. There was never any of the jealousy you'll often find between brothers. There were times I wished I could be going to college, and times he wished he could be earning his keep, like me, and have some spare cash to blow, but I knew right along I wasn't cut out for studying, and he knew he'd do all right once the grind was over. Riley would have been a good engineer if he'd lived. Riley was good not only at the things he liked but also at the things he had to do. He didn't like the Army any more than I did, but six months after they drafted him, he was a lieutenant and running a platoon.

Say Riley had lived to be the best mechanical engineer in the country. Say he'd invented a perpetual-motion machine or built a rocket to the moon. Nothing like that could have given my old man the bang he got out of those two gold bars. Edgerton wasn't big enough to hold him when Riley made lieutenant. He'd go over to Forest Valley and drink in some joint, and after two short beers, out of his wallet would come the picture of his son the lieutenant. Riley would get home on a three-day leave, and the old man would call a meeting of air-raid wardens and make Riley give a lecture on strategy. He'd run to the local paper with Riley's personal letters, and Riley had to threaten to stop writing. Riley told me about that when he came to see me at Fort Campbell, just before I shipped overseas. We had a few drinks and went off on one of our old-time laughing jags. We'd hit a spell like that, and anything we said, no matter if it was funny or not, would make us laugh. We laughed until we saw practically the whole barroom was laughing with or at us. We left our table and went to sit in one of those booths, where we could laugh in private, but once we got there, we didn't feel like laughing any more. That's when he told me he was on his way to ship over with a lot of other lieutenants.

"I guess I should have gone home instead of coming to see you," he said, "but you know how it is. The old man would have made a thing of it. You tell them I'll be all right."

I said I'd do that. I had no idea I'd be on shipment myself inside of a week.

"All infantry lieutenants," he said. "That means we'll be shoved in as replacements. Here I've been a PX officer for more than a year, and now they'll give me a platoon. I know they will. I swear I don't even remember my signals any more."

"They'll brush you up on all that," I said.

"It'll take more than a brushup to make a line officer out of me. I don't know, there's something that's been in my mind ever since I got my orders—one of those field problems they don't give you in basic. Say I'm sent out on patrol with a squad. I have a chance of goofing off, with nobody the wiser, or a fifty-fifty chance of coming back. What do I do? What would you do?"

"I'd have to know more about it," I said.

"No, you wouldn't. You're out there in the woods and you've got your choice."

"I don't know," I said. "I'll wait till I get there. I don't have to decide now."

"I do. I want to decide now while I can think straight, not out there where I'll be all fagged out and walking in a daze, maybe. If I could be sure I'd goof off, I'd turn in my commission now."

I don't remember what else we said, because about then an M.P. lieutenant showed up and asked to see Riley outside. Riley was gone less than five minutes. When he came back, he told me he'd been warned about drinking in public with an enlisted man. He didn't exactly tell the M.P. off, but he did ask to see the written rule. There isn't any.

"'Customs of the service,' the guy said," Riley told me. "'In other words,' I said, 'chicken.' 'That's right,' he said. 'Chicken.' He was only doing his job."

Then something else got us laughing again, and we went off on another jag.

About the field problem that was bothering Riley that day, I don't guess it ever came up in Italy. In combat, you almost never act the way you think you will before you know anything about it. Being in charge of a platoon, just as he thought he would be, he must have gone on a lot of patrols in Italy. And, judging by the letter that came from his captain, he must have done all right, until an artillery barrage got him at Salerno. A few of the men from his platoon also wrote, to say they were sorry.

For both my father's and my mother's sake I wish I could have been home when those letters came. But maybe it's just as well I wasn't. Maybe it's just as well my father went all to pieces, because my mother had to take hold and that probably kept her from cracking up herself.

First off, my father wouldn't go to work for a week. He sat around the house and stared in front of him without seeing anybody or anything. He wouldn't go to church with my mother. He wouldn't answer the telephone. He averaged about one meal a day.

Then he went to work on Riley's room. He had thirty or forty of Riley's pictures framed and he hung them all in there. He said nobody outside the family was going to sleep in that room as long as he lived. He was going to keep it as a shrine. That was what he said—a shrine. He wrote an article about Riley, and the paper ran it just as it was written. He had the name of the Edgerton Legion Post changed to the Riley Greer Post. Nobody voted against that, of course. Riley was the first Edgerton man killed.

Dr. Melasky told me that my father would have gone out of his mind if it hadn't been for my mother taking hold. My mother pulled through by going to church every day. Old Mr. Haislip would meet her there, and they would pray together.

Mr. Haislip was at the house yesterday afternoon when the casket was due to arrive. My father was there, too, and they talked about the arrangements. Every so often, my father would get on the telephone and give instructions to the band leader, or to the lady in charge of the Girl Scouts, or to Engstrom, the fellow commanding the honor guard. "It's got to be right," he said to Engstrom. "Riley was a soldier. It's got to be right."

"I don't see why there has to be a band," I said. "Or Girl Scouts, or anything else."

My father and my mother must have been too shocked to speak. They looked at Mr. Haislip.

Mr. Haislip said, "Those little girls wish to pay their last respects, Bob. They wish to show their gratitude. Riley gave his life that they might live in peace and plenty."

"Riley didn't give his life," I said. "It was taken from him."

"We can't pretend to know what was in Riley's heart."

"No, sir. But I can tell you he didn't give his life. I knew Riley. I slept in the same bed with him for thirteen years. He didn't give his life, and neither did anybody else I knew overseas. People got killed. They had no choice about it. Sometimes it looked as if they did, but they didn't. Riley was hit by a piece of steel. And if he knew his bones were going to be dug up so they can be buried again, with a band playing and people popping guns in the air—"

"Bob!" my mother said.

I went on the back porch and smoked a cigarette. I shouldn't have talked like that to Mr. Haislip. Like the M.P. lieutenant at Campbell, he was doing his job. Tomorrow, at the funeral, he'll make a big speech and repeat that lie about Riley giving his life. He won't think it's a lie, so he'll be able to tell it with a clear conscience. And there'll be plenty of combat veterans there to believe him. I don't know what happens to people's memories.

Somebody from the station called up to say the casket had arrived. My father asked me to go with him. I said I'd rather stay with Mother. He said if a man phoned about the caisson, to tell him to deliver it direct to the Legion Hall.

Mother and I sat in the parlor. She took hold of my hand, and we sat there until a florist called up, and I gave him the number of the Legion Hall. After that, there were no more phone calls, except my father to say he was bringing someone home for dinner—the lieutenant who had come with the coffin from New York. He was a fine man, my father said, and he'd been a lot of help. So my mother put on a couple of extra chops.

My father must have taken a real shine to that lieutenant, because when the two of them came in, it turned out that the man was going to sleep in Riley's room over the weekend. He was going to be the first one outside the family to go in there at all. The thing about him that got my father was the three rows of ribbons on his chest. They weren't all cheese ribbons, either. Lieutenant Brennan had the Silver Star, besides a lot of hash marks. He was a real old-time regular. My father made a big fuss over him.

"I'd serve you a drink, Lieutenant," my father said, "but Mrs. Greer won't stand for liquor in the house. It's the way she was brought up." My mother was out in the kitchen.

"That's all right, sir. Are you sure it's no trouble to have me stay with you?"

"No trouble at all. You look close at the pictures in the room upstairs and you'll see what kind of a boy you brought home. Bob here was one of your buddies, too. Saw plenty of combat with the 14th Armored. Lieutenant Brennan has been on escort duty ever since they started bringing the boys home, Bob. He's told me about some of his experiences. It's sad work. Tell Bob what that poor woman said to you last week."

"Well, that doesn't often happen, sir."

"The woman told him she wished it was him instead of her boy. You won't run into anything like that here, Lieutenant. Mrs. Greer and I appreciate all the Army has done—letting you stay in town for the funeral and all. You've been a big help."

"Well, sir, we appreciate folks like you, too. It's a privilege to work with a good American family—a privilege and an honor. It more than makes up for what happened with that lady last week and with another lady, an Eyetalian lady, back a year ago. We took six of the boys home to that town, and they were all going to be placed to rest together. The mayor of the town was there, and a general from the National Guard. And this Eyetalian lady, standing there in the mothers' group, she broke formation and ripped the flag off her boy's casket. She tried to jump in the grave. Well, sir, it was a mother's grief. But there were five more mothers there besides her, and she showed no consideration. An Eyetalian lady. So you can see it's a privilege to work with folks like you."

"We're getting some National Guard out this Sunday," my father said.

It wasn't until later that I found out he had arranged for delegations of legionnaires from every town in the county. He was like a stage manager half an hour before the curtain goes up. His boy's funeral was going to be just as big and long and wide and military as he could make it. Even if he'd been doing it for somebody else, all that stage-managing would have turned my stomach. Being that it was for Riley, I wanted to leave Edgerton, go away and never come back.

After dinner, my father and the Lieutenant went off to organize the firing squad.

I sat on the back porch again, in the dark, and listened to the katydids. The cat jumped into my lap and went to sleep.

Pretty soon my mother came out. "I want to go to the Legion Hall and pray," she said. "Will you come with me?"

All the way over, she held my hand. We didn't meet anyone we knew.

The Legion Hall was lighted up inside. The doors were open. The casket was at the other end, with a flag on it and flowers all around. Right and left of the casket, Art Stacy and Duke Gregg were standing guard in uniform. They had Enfields.

"Will you come in and pray with me?" my mother asked.

"I'll go in with you," I said, "but I can't pray. I don't know how. I've told you that."

"Won't you come in and pray for your brother?"

"Riley wouldn't have wanted it."

"Riley died young. He had no chance to learn about our Lord. This is *your* chance, Bob."

"I don't know how to pray," I said. "Sometimes I'd like to, but I don't know how."

"Then I wish to pray alone. Could you ask those boys to wait outside?"

Duke and Art went and stood outside. My mother said she would probably be a long time, and for me to go home. Then she shut the doors herself. I didn't feel like talking with anybody. I walked up and down in back of the building. I looked in at one of the side windows and saw my mother kneeling at the foot of the casket. Duke and Art were relieved, and two older men from the Legion took their places. Every time I looked in at the side windows, my mother was kneeling there in the same position. I wished I had gone in to pray with her.

That was yesterday. Now I'm glad I did not go in. Today I think I was right in believing that Riley would not have wanted to be prayed over. He would not have wanted them to stand guard over him, either, or blow taps. Riley had no use for any of that. He had no use for Mr. Haislip or my father or Duke Gregg or Art Stacy. None of them, not even my mother, ever knew what Riley Greer was all about. I did. He was my friend, and I'll never have another one like him. Grown men can't make friends, not really, not like boys. That piece of steel at Salerno killed the only man that ever knew what I was all about. Why or for what or for whom he died, I can't say, and neither can anyone else, least of all the people who will follow that caisson around town tomorrow.

Everything will be run off according to schedule. The Cub Scouts will be out there, wishing they were Boy Scouts, and the Boy Scouts will be wishing they were soldiers. My mother won't break formation and go ripping up the flag. My father will stand at attention when the band plays, stand straight and proud, like the general's orderly he is. He won't wince when the firing squad lets go with the blanks. And Mr. Haislip will tell them all that Riley gave his life.

Everybody will be present or accounted for. My father will account for me. He won't want any loose ends to spoil his boy's military funeral. And you can't blame him for that. You can't blame a man for having spent his best year as a soldier in Paris. You can't blame old Mr. Haislip for repeating once more that my brother gave his life. But I don't want to be there to hear it.

The Wacky Afternoon

September, 1947

The football squad had been called together for routine skull practice but George Kress knew there was to be something more. The new uniforms had arrived. Until this year the players had had to buy their own equipment, so Edgerton had always looked like a pickup team. Now the school had bought twenty complete outfits, and Mr. Vogel, the coach, had laid them out with care. The brilliant crimson jerseys and the beautiful shoulder pads were arranged in neat rows against the wall of the gym.

"I've seen to it that this season you'll go out there looking like a team," Mr. Vogel said. "It's up to you to play like one. You've got a tough schedule lined up. I'd be the last man to deny that. But down deep I'm convinced you can come through unbeaten and untied. If you don't, I'll want to know the reason why. You've got the biggest, the heaviest, the fastest squad of any high school in the county, so it's just a matter of using your heads. Remember, it's not the fancy helmet, it's what's in it that counts.

"Some of you are going to be disappointed. There aren't enough uniforms to go around. So I want to say a few words to the men whose name is not on this list. Don't give up the ship. This is a Vogel team, which means that every man jack here has a chance until the last whistle of that last game. There's never been any stars on a Vogel team yet. That's not the way I operate, and you know it. The man who stays in there fighting is the man who'll end up with the job. My money rides on a hundred and thirty pounds of panther against nine hundred pounds of cow any day in the week. Now here's the list, and remember how I feel about squawkers."

George Kress weighed a hundred and thirty pounds. It was just as though Mr. Vogel had been speaking directly to him. George didn't have to examine the list to know that his name wasn't on it. All the same, he took a long look. Several juniors had made it and there was even a sophomore—Johnson, that overgrown slob. I can run double circles around Johnson, George thought. Here I am a senior and my last chance gone. If Vogel thinks I'm going out there in my sweatshirt, with sophomores sporting uniforms, he's got another think coming. That's some panther he's got, that Johnson.

After the uniforms had been handed out, George sat through the skull practice without hearing a word. The diagrams made no sense to him at all, and he was afraid Vogel would call on him for an answer and make him look like a fool. Already he felt like one, squatting there on the wrestling mat, behind Johnson's broad back, hoping to stay out of Vogel's sight. The scraping of Vogel's chalk against the blackboard made little shivers run all over George's body. His mouth tasted bitter. He knew he could run faster than Johnson, kick farther, and pass more accurately. Some panther, that Johnson.

George tried to feel like a panther. A panther would have been on top of Vogel in a single leap, roaring. A panther could have ripped that hairy throat open, crushed the skull, and scattered the guts. Vogel always talked about guts, only he called it intestinal fortitude. A panther would have spilled his intestinal fortitude for him but good. Lying low in the prairie grass, George could see the look of terror sweeping across Vogel's face. In the Tarzan books, panthers always went for the jugular. George swung from tree to tree and he threw an eighty-yard forward pass with a coconut and there wasn't an empty seat in the Yankee Stadium. Mud on the crimson uniforms, mud up to the ankles, but George Kress loose in the open, reversing his field, straight-arming, crossing the line with two men hanging on. Too bad, Davis. . . . sorry, Blanchard. Better luck next time.

When skull practice was over, George didn't wait for Henry Odum, with whom he usually walked home. Henry had been near the top of Vogel's list, and George didn't feel like being told to buck up. Crummy enough to get a raw deal without having somebody pat you on the back about it. Shortening or stretching his stride according to the lines in the cement sidewalk, George ran almost all the way home. Bad luck to step on a crack once you'd made up your mind not to. Step on a crack, break your grandmother's back. Step on a crack, break your grandmother's back.

At home, in the kitchen, his mother was peeling potatoes. She said, "You come in without a civil word, make a beeline for the refrigerator. The least you could do is say good afternoon and ask if we have something to eat."

George picked out the largest apple. "Good afternoon," he said. "Do we have something to eat?"

"I don't like your attitude," she said.

"Sorry."

"You're rude."

"I said sorry."

He started to leave the kitchen but she called him back. "There's something I want to ask you, Junior."

"Ask me," George said. "But don't call me Junior. You expect me to talk all proper and polite, but when I ask a favor, you won't do it. I told you I don't want to be called Junior. I got a name, you gave it to me yourself, so why don't you use it?"

"George, I want you to take the chip off your shoulder. I can't talk to you when you get like that. What's the matter with you anyway?"

"Nothing."

"Dear, why don't you let yourself be nice? You can be nice when you let yourself. But you snap at me and I snap back at you and we don't get anyplace. Your father telephoned me from work this morning. He wants to know where you took the car last night."

"He said I could take it."

"I know that. You told him you were going to the picture show in Forest Valley. And he told you not to take it any farther, because the spare was being retreaded and he didn't want the car stuck with a flat out in the middle of nowhere. When he drove to work, he noticed you'd run up ninety miles on the speedometer."

"I put back the gas," said George. "I paid for it out of my allowance."

"That's not the point. The point is he told you not to go farther than Forest Valley and you did. Also, he had two packs of cigarettes in the glove compartment and those were gone."

"There was six of us in the car and they all smoked. I didn't smoke more than one or two myself. So they smoked them up, so what? When you and Dad give a party, there's practically a whole carton shot. If it isn't one thing with him, it's another. He's trying to treat me like I was twelve years old."

"George, be fair. He let you use the car. The only reason he told you not to go farther than Forest Valley was because he didn't trust the tires. He needs that car to drive to work in. And he expected to find some cigarettes in the compartment. Be fair."

"All right," George said. "I'm in the wrong. Every time it's me. Crime don't pay. You can't win. All right."

He went out through the back door, barely managing to control an impulse to slam it. He walked downtown and this time he stepped intentionally on the cracks in the sidewalk. Step on a crack, break your grandmother's back. If Mother wanted to take Dad's side, ler her. In the old days, at least you could talk to her, explain, but now she took his side every chance she got. Now, for two measly packs of cigarettes, she took his side. All right, if that was the way they wanted it.

George looked in the drugstore, but he knew no one there. The candy store was empty except for a couple of punk kids. What a town. Dead from the neck up, dead from the neck down. Five miles to the nearest bowling alley, seven to the nearest picture show. Besides, those six gallons of gas last night had finished his allowance.

Not so long ago there had at least been the Junior Volunteer Fire Company. George had belonged to that along with all the other fellows between fifteen and eighteen. The town was glad enough to have them then, but now the men were back from the service and the Juniors gone to pot because there was nothing to do. The service men had taken over, and it got so you couldn't tell the difference between the Fire Company and the Legion post. All those guys could talk about was the time the Juniors let a brush fire get out of hand and the outfit from Forest Valley had to pitch in and do the job. They let you wax and polish the truck all right, but when it came to going out on an alarm, they acted like you were some punk trying to steal a ride.

George turned off the street called Broadway and stopped in front of the firehouse. Duke Gregg and Art Stacy were sitting just inside the door. They weren't so bad. Anyway, they hadn't talked up at the meeting where the Juniors were told not to hang around the truck on Sundays. Duke had been with the Marines on Peleliu and Art had made the jump with the paratroops on Corregidor. Now they drove trucks for the milk company, so they had most of their afternoons free. George said hello to them. They said hello without shifting their positions.

"So when this lieutenant commander got through talking," Duke said, "I got a few things off my chest."

"What'd you tell him?" said Art.

"I said it's pretty late in the year for the Navy to start worrying all of a sudden about the Marines being pushed around by the Army. The Army couldn't push us around no worse than you boys have, I told him. All the time we were getting our brains beat out on Peleliu, there was a whole Army combat team cruising around the island, begging to come in and help, but no, we were going to be tough and do it alone. I got nothing against the Army, I told him. You boys are scared they'll out-rank you. I ain't. I've scrounged too many supplies from Army dumps to worry about things like that. I've seen too many Army P-51s in the air while Marines were still flying hand-me-down Navy crates. Well, you should have seen his face. He started going off in a cloud of balloon juice about the over-all picture. I says Brother, I ain't worrying about the over-all picture. I'm telling you about the picture as it looks to the man in overalls."

"I wish I'd been there to hear it," Art said.

"I wish you'd been there, too," said Duke. "You could have told this joker about Corregidor. Whatever they say about MacArthur, he prepared his beachheads beforehand."

"Well, the Navy shelling helped us a lot," Art said.

"This joker wouldn't have known that. He sat it out down Church Street in New York."

"That's where I want to sit out the next one."

"I'd just as soon sit it out right here," Duke said. He stretched his legs.

"You're a slacker from way back," said Art. "I want to do my share. I want to sit in that recruiting office on Church Street and tell George about the advantages of the service. What about it, George? Want to fight the next war?"

"I wish I'd been old enough for this one," George said.

"He wishes he'd been old enough for this one," said Art.

"Why do you wish that?" Duke asked.

"I don't know. You fellows came through it all right."

"There's some who didn't," Duke said. "All that time you put in wondering whether to be born or not were the best-spent years of your life."

"You fellows been places and done things."

"You've done things," Duke said. "Remember that brush fire you put out with the help of the boys from Forest Valley? You've done things. And you're in a pretty good place. What's wrong with this town?"

"It's dead from the neck up," George said.

"Not as dead as my three platoon sergeants, and all in one day. Go through a day like that and you appreciate this town."

"Not George," said Art. "George is my meat. I can't wait to get that job down Church Street and tell George about the advantages of the service. When it's all over, you get to go to Harvard and bring your kids up in a Quonset hut. George has the right idea. He wants to go places and do things. Maybe I can fix it for him to join my old outfit. Maybe the Five Hundred and Third will get another chance to drop on the golf course on Corregidor. How would you like that, George? We didn't run into nothing worse than small-arms fire."

"I guess I could handle myself," George said.

"Let me take your full name and address," Art said. "You're the kind of man I'll be looking for on Church Street."

"Lay off him," said Duke Gregg. "George is regular. I wouldn't be surprised if he was a pretty good man to have on your side. I hear that brush fire covered almost half an acre and those eighty boys put it out all by themselves. There was flames there, I hear, come clear up to the knees. That's rugged work, now."

"Must've taken a lot of organization too," Art said. "I hear these Juniors had a real military-type organization, chain of command, lot of brass and everything. What were you, George, a rear admiral?"

"You fellows are so wise," George said. "I was nothing but a private. We didn't have nothing higher than a captain, and you got one, too. That brush fire covered ten acres at least."

"How come you were nothing but a private?" said Art. "Couldn't you cut the buck? How do you expect me to recommend you for the Five Hundred and Third?"

"You fellows think you're wise," George said.

These guys had no business going to town on him. Just because they happened to get drafted was no reason why they were better than anybody else. He wished he had the nerve to tell them that. They sat there running off at the lip like they hadn't been drafted. I won't wait to be drafted when my time comes, not like some people I know, George wanted to say. But his mouth felt full of the bitter taste and he didn't know whether he'd have the nerve to jump out of an airplane like Art had on Corregidor. Art's arms filled up the sleeves of his shirt so there wasn't hardly any room left under the cloth. He was even bigger than Johnson. Size wasn't everything. . . . George wished he could force himself to say these things but his mouth felt so funny and he was afraid if he started to talk he'd bust out crying. Already his eyes had grown dim with tears. He turned and walked out of the firehouse. He strained his ears to hear if Duke and Art were laughing but just then a big trailer roared down Broadway and everybody looked at it and George was glad they weren't looking at him.

He went past the candy store and the drugstore again, and still no one he cared to see had shown up. He wished he had enough money to buy a camera. He walked past the glass-encased Honor Roll and wished his name were on it. He wished those wacky Russians would start something in a couple of years when he'd be a lieutenant in a submarine and he was taking her through a minefield and the hell with that son of a bitch Vogel, and Duke Gregg and Art Stacy, too.

He stopped, without thinking, in front of the Odums' house and rang the bell. Mrs. Odum answered.

"Henry isn't here," she said. "I thought you'd be with him. He took the car to school. I thought you'd all gone swimming in the pool at Forest Valley."

"Henry didn't say anything to me about it."

"He probably forgot. I know he was taking a large group. Maybe there wasn't room for any more."

"Well, thanks," George said.

He walked back along Broadway. All right. All right for you, Henry Odum, you lousy, nickel-nursing deadbeat. I was good enough last night, when I had the car and two packs of cigarettes and I took a chance on getting stuck without a spare. You probably forgot to tell me about the swimming. Yes, you did. All you had was seven hours to tell me, you double-crossing bastard.

George wanted to smash his fist into the dusty pane of glass that covered the Honor Roll. He bent down and picked a clover but it had only three leaves. He pressed his palms together, flexing his biceps to make them thick and hard like Art Stacy's. That nickel-nursing, double-crossing, lousy deadbeat of a Henry.

Across the street, in front of the A. & P., two men were unloading a truck. George sat down on the grass and watched them piling cartons high on the sidewalk. One of the men wore an old green field jacket. He'd been in the Army, too. George didn't know if he wanted to be in the Army, the Navy, or the Marines. He thought maybe his best bet would be the infantry, because he could move through the forest with less noise than anyone he knew. More like an Indian. George had done a lot of stalking in the woods on the other side of the railroad. Once, he'd sneaked up to no more than a yard of a ground hog, close enough to have grabbed it. Boy Scout stuff maybe to some people but a damn handy way to be when your platoon is deployed in the woods. You can go out on patrol and locate the enemy, listen in on their plans. George thought that as soon as he got to the age when you can sign without your parents' consent, he would join the infantry.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and at the same time a voice said, "Well, here's George Kress, the old fire fighter, passing the time of day."

Duke Gregg and Art Stacy had left the firehouse and come up on the grass behind him.

"Ah, nuts," George said. "You fellows think you're funny."

"Don't be mad," said Duke. "We were only kidding. Come on down to Iversen's; we'll stand you to a beer."

"Sure," Art said. "What the hell, George. Don't be a sorehead. Can't you take a joke?"

"I can take a joke," George said. He stood up and studied their faces to see if they weren't just letting on, if they really wanted him to go to Iversen's. It looked like they did. George had been forbidden by his father to go into Iversen's but he didn't care about that now. Anybody who was small enough to put in a long-distance call about two measly packs of cigarettes shouldn't expect people to obey his orders.

Iversen's bar was across the railroad tracks that cut Edgerton in half. George walked alongside of Art and Duke, hoping they wouldn't start acting up again, wishing Henry Odum were there to see him. He was wishing, too, for a cigarette to smoke but he didn't want to ask for one.

"What's the team going to be like this year?" Art asked. "They tell me Vogel's knee-deep in material."

"We ought to make out good," George said.

"You're about due," said Art. "This town hasn't had a real team since '38. They'd never have scored on us if I hadn't started chasing butterflies in that last quarter. We were forty-five points ahead. I was playing safety and I didn't have to make more than two tackles all afternoon. Just my luck to miss one of them."

"The breaks," George said. "I'd rather be lucky than good."

"Brother, you got something there," Duke said.

George felt proud to be walking along the street with Art and Duke, talking back and forth like that. He said, "I see where Mr. Huffer got eight hundred dollars for his bloodhound. They say he could've got more if he'd advertised." George's father had said so at breakfast yesterday.

"If he could've got more," Duke said, "he would've. At that, eight hundred's not so much for a bloodhound he's been training for years. Take the amount of time he's put in on the bitch. I'll lay money he didn't get more per hour than he could've made working on a road gang."

"It's easier work, though," said George. "And he's got something to show for it."

"There's that," said Duke.

Duke and Art were a couple of nice fellows once you really got to know them. They weren't like these hicks who went once a year to Radio City Music Hall and came back to brag about it. Duke and Art had been around. If they lived in Edgerton, that was because they felt like it and not because they didn't know of any other place. George hoped they'd stick to beer and not offer him hard liquor, because two jiggers of whiskey were about his limit. In the morning, at school, he'd say to Henry Odum, quiet like, "I was having a beer with Art Stacy and Duke Gregg, and Art said . . ."

George had never been in Iversen's bar except to deliver papers, years ago. Now he lined up with the other men and put his foot on the railing. Iversen had a lot of signs up. "Free Old-Fashioneds to everyone over eighty who brings their parents." "Don't complain about our coffee. You may be old and weak yourself some day." "We have an arrangement with the First National Bank. They don't sell liquor and we don't cash checks."

Carl Iversen was a stout man. When Duke asked him for three beers, he said, "Sorry. Not allowed to serve minors."

"Bull," Duke said. "George here can drink you under your own bar."

"Most likely," said Iversen. "But I can't serve minors."

"You can give him a coke or something, can't you?" Duke asked.

"I couldn't even serve him a glass of water, not on the premises."

"That's a hell of a note," Art said "What's got into you, Carl? Do you realize you're turning down a future member of the Five Hundred and Third Parachute Regiment, maybe its colonel commanding?"

"I can't help that," said Iversen. "I got to obey the law. You want me to get run out of town?"

"You don't know what you're doing," Art said. "Why, this town owes its life to George Kress—George and them other Junior Volunteers. Why, if it wasn't for George and them Juniors, this whole town would have gone up in that brush fire. You're not going to stand there and refuse a drink to a rear admiral in the Juniors?"

There were about a dozen men in the bar and they all either laughed or smiled. Art and Duke were smiling, too. George looked at them, and at that moment he hated Art and Duke worse than he hated Carl Iversen, worse than he'd hated his father or Vogel or Henry Odum earlier in the afternoon. He turned sharply and went out of the bar, before all the men there could see the tears in his eyes. He heard Art calling after him, something about an ice-cream soda, and then he started to walk very fast. When he reached the railroad, he broke into a run along the tracks. He ran until there were no more houses, only woods on either side. He fought to keep his face from becoming distorted like the face of a bawling punk, but he couldn't keep the tears back. He sat down to catch his breath. He knew he'd be late for supper now and he knew almost exactly what his father would say.

He wished for a passenger train to come by, so he could heave a rock through one of the windows, but no train came. The woods were quiet except for the wind in the trees and the whirring flight of some birds out of sight, probably pheasants off the state preserve. George wished he had a shotgun. He wanted to kill something, somebody. He felt like the time he had those wacky fever dreams in the hospital with pneumonia, dreams that wouldn't let you sleep and yet you could never quite force yourself to wake up and get rid of them. He searched in his pockets for a stick of chewing gum to take away the bitter taste, which had now become stronger than ever. But all he could find were two boxes of matches. Henry Odum, the bastard, had smoked up all the cigarettes last night and left only matches.

George began walking along the tracks again. Through the trees he could see the roof of Owen Conklin's house. Owen Conklin was an old man who bred ferrets. He had no family and he lived alone near the tracks. He was always blowing about how hard it was to breed ferrets, how clean and warm they had to be kept and all that, but people said his own house looked like a pigsty. George had never been inside. Owen Conklin was always blowing about how ferrets were better at mousing than any cat and how hard it was to keep them from eating their young. Everybody in the whole lousy town of Edgerton was always blowing, tooting their own horn, and George was sick of it. He wondered if he couldn't lie about his age and enlist in the infantry now. The infantry could use men who knew their way around the woods.

He thought he'd sneak up on Owen Conklin's house like an Indian. He bet nobody, not even the ferrets, would hear him. He crouched and started to crawl, taking care not to make the least little noise. The house was no more than thirty yards away. George approached it slowly, and the nearer he came the more excited he got, almost as if there'd been a real machine-gun nest down there. Behind the barn where the ferrets were kept, he had to stop for a while and lie on the ground because his head was full of those wacky fever dreams. There was one dream that kept coming back, where he had hold of a long steel wire that stretched farther than he could see and something very powerful was pulling at the other end but he was afraid to let go and afraid the wire would snap and coil around him.

George let his face rest against the cool earth. The windows of the barn were high and he heard no noise from the ferrets. He began to crawl again, rounded the barn, and came up behind the woodshed. If Owen Conklin was home, he gave no signs of it. George bet the old man couldn't have heard him anyway. There was a missing plank in the wall of the shed and George could see about a cord of wood inside and several bales of straw.

After that, everything happened fast. George lit a match, reached in, and set fire to one of the bales. When he saw it was going to catch, he ducked behind the barn and started to crawl back along the way he'd come. He hadn't crawled more than half the distance when he got so scared he had to jump up and run. He was scared wild and crazy. He ran to the tracks and across and into the woods on the other side. He could hear Mr. Huffer's bloodhound chasing him.

He ran through the undergrowth, ripping his clothes, ran without thinking or feeling, until his head struck a low branch and he had to stop and wipe the blood out of his eyes. He was deep in the woods. He sat down on a mossy rock and dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief. When that got too bloody, he used the tail of his shirt. He had no idea how long he sat there. He didn't really start thinking until the siren sounded, and then he thought let Duke and Art put that one out, the bastards.

New Year's Day

December, 1949

Although the smell of Janet's good coffee had already made its delicate way upstairs and she had set the thermostat at just the proper temperature for a man faced with the prospect of getting out of bed, Gordon Turner had no desire to move his legs from beneath the covers. He could not respond, as he felt he should, to the bright winter sunshine and the fact of New Year's Day and the knowledge that he would not have to take the 8:35 to town; first the 8:35, then the taxi, then the elevator to the door marked "Pratt, Turner, Fry & Burckhardt."

Day after tomorrow, yes. Day after tomorrow, the girl at the switchboard will say, "Good morning, Mr. Turner. Happy New Year!" And Mr. Turner will say, "Good morning, Miss Flaherty. Did you have a good Christmas?" And inside, the young man (who had come so highly recommended by Professor Powell) would nod and smile and perhaps dream of the day when he, like Mr. Turner, could take ten days off at Christmas and wake up with *his* bright winter sunshine pouring through the leaded windows of a Tudor (-type) house. Four master bedrooms, three baths.

Gordon got heavily out of bed. I just now got heavily out of bed, he thought. I'm a heavy man. I lack charm. The way I know is, Dick Pratt, my law partner of twenty years' standing, has recently told me so. He said, "Gordon, how about letting *me* handle that Ewing case in court? I don't see that there's any law involved, to speak of. Question of charming the twelve good men and true. You could take the papers home with you over the holidays, and I could pick your brains when you come back."

Nothing ambiguous about that. Pratt for the charm, Turner for sound judgment and in time of crisis, Fry to bring the customers in, Burckhardt for routine. No one could say that so natural a division of labor had not worked well through the years. Nevertheless, Gordon had said, "I don't want to take any work home with me this time. I'm going to be with my girls. I won't get to see them again till Easter."

"Oh, of course," Dick had said. "My God, think of Carrie and Alice in *college*."

But Gordon had brought the Ewing papers home, all right. To be sure, he had not yet so much as taken them out of his briefcase. He had waited until the girls would be gone. And now the girls were gone. Last night, he had driven them down to the train himself; they were certainly, perhaps irrevocably, gone.

After seeing his face in the bathroom mirror, Gordon decided to shave. Janet would hear the water running, and she would time breakfast accordingly. Look at my face, he thought, this face of a ruminant moose, this ponderous, solemn face, this visage. Ask yourself, he thought, if you were two girls aged eighteen and nineteen would you want to spend your time looking at a face like this, even if it belonged to your father?

You would not. Already, last summer at the camp on Lake Champlain, the girls had ignored him during the few weekends he had managed to get up there. But last summer he could take being left out. The pace at the office had not left much of him to *be* left out. He could watch Carrie and Alice being young and beautiful at the beach, and, for the time being, that was almost enough.

True, he had missed the little talks with Carrie. Alice had always been the classic second child, able to look after herself, secure, but Carrie had needed him and clung to him. Carrie had hesitated a long time before going off to her mother's old college, out West. Carrie would just as soon have gone to Vassar, which he had suggested mostly because it was near. But Janet had laughed and said, "I didn't bring my daughter up to be a social worker. I want boys around her—hundreds of them. She's been a daddy's girl long enough." So Carrie went off and stopped being Daddy's girl.

Gordon did not feel unduly jealous of the boys around Carrie. It was a source of some pride, in fact, to know she was so assiduously courted. He had tried not to press her with too many foolish adult questions about how the boys came to be adored and discarded in such bewildering profusion. It had jolted him all the more when, on Christmas Day, in reply to a casual inquiry about Bill Wicker, last year's leading aspirant, Carrie said, "Oh, Dad, please stop *hovering*."

There was a law in it—granted—but no justice; the old, sad, expedient distinction. The law of the generations, and now it was his turn to step aside, with at least some of the antique grace his own father had been able to command. But Janet was not stepping aside. She knew in the fullest possible detail what had happened with Bill Wicker. Time and again during the past nine days, Gordon had heard the girls and Janet laughing happily in the garage, in the bathroom, outdoors; and a couple of times, even after being told, on request, what the joke was, he could not, for lack of context, truly participate in it. Janet had ease and charm. Janet could roll with the punches. She would never have to step aside. I must learn to be charming, he thought, like Dick Pratt and Janet. I must try and remain young with my daughters. Try and; I have about as much chance as I'd have of changing this face, this heavy, stupid moose face in the mirror. Gordon wiped the last patches of lather off and went downstairs for breakfast.

"Happy New Year," Janet said. Gordon watched her closely as she came and went between the kitchen and the dining alcove. Janet even moved like a young woman. A few feet away, the silver streaks were indistinguishable from the rest of her neatly done ash-blond hair. She served an excellent breakfast—the tumbler of orange juice cold but not too cold, the coffee hot but not too hot, the bacon crisp. And she knew enough not to talk until Gordon had finished his first cup of coffee.

Then she said, "Eat hearty, my dear. You won't get a very elaborate dinner tonight. I had to promise Molly McBain I'd be over for tea. I left you with an out, so you don't have to come unless you want to."

"No."

"I had to accept for me. I'd turned her down twice last week. Poor sweet, she wants to crow a little about her boy. He's been admitted to some school or other. Going to study to be an ambassador. I suppose I'll do my own share of crowing about the girls."

"What are *they* studying to be?"

Janet looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I asked Carrie why she was taking that course in Spanish, and all she'd say was 'Oh, why does anybody take *any* course?' In fact, all the answers she gave me were apt to begin with an irritable 'Oh.' Not that I had much of a chance to ask questions. Out of the nine evenings, how many did Carrie and Alice actually spend at home?"

"Gordon, they're young."

"Yes?"

"Those boys must have bought theatre tickets months in advance. The girls couldn't disappoint them—Alice, particularly. She's very fond of Gene. He was her first date. Don't you remember, years ago, when he called here with that heart-shaped box of candy?"

"No."

"And the girls have looked forward to seeing the shows, too. It'll be quite a thing at college to've seen 'South Pacific.' I think the girls had a lovely vacation. They were enchanted with the presents you picked out."

"Were they? Did I?"

"Yes, they were. And of course you did. All I supplied were the measurements. You know you picked their dresses. Gordon, is anything wrong?"

"No," he said. He stood up and went out to the hall.

Janet followed him as far as the doorway. The morning paper was not in its usual place.

She said, "I meant to tell you. The boy didn't leave the paper."

"God damn him! That's the second time in a week. What happened?"

Puzzled, Janet said, "I think he just forgot. He's new. I was intending to drive downtown and pick it up for you before breakfast. Didn't get a chance. I'll go pick it up now."

Gordon had half hoped she would snap back at him. She had not, and now he felt foolish. The vehemence in his tone had been disproportionate, at best, and the patience in hers served only to annoy him. He turned abruptly and went into the living room. On the sofa he found a copy of *Mademoiselle,* left by the girls. He began to turn its pages. He was among the girdle and brassière ads when he heard Janet starting the car. He thought, I suppose I ought to look into Ewing v. Ewing. If I don't, Dick may fall back on his charm again, and for once he may not land on his feet.

It took only five minutes to drive from the Turners' house to the center of Edgerton, but Janet was gone half an hour. As she came in from the terrace, he reached for the *Times* under her arm. She didn't hand it over at once.

"Don't read now," she said. "I've had a rather gratifying thing happen to me in the village."

"Bruce apologize for not sending the paper?"

"He did more than that. He asked me to a dance."

Gordon looked at her incredulously. "Bruce? The druggist?"

"Not the old man. Young Bruce. He said there's to be a square dance at the Legion Hall and would you and I care to come? A Get-Acquainted Dance, he called it, for the entire neighborhood. I told him you didn't dance, and he said in that case he would be more than happy to take me."

"He didn't."

"He most certainly did. It was all in a neighborly spirit, you may be sure, and he's taking a whole carload of people, but he managed quite a fatuous leer withal."

"He can do that," Gordon said. "Young Bruce is regarded as something of a ladies' man around Edgerton."

"He must be. We stood there flirting until his father came out from the prescription department."

"The tableau has its charm—" Gordon began. Then the telephone rang. As Janet walked across the room to answer it, he was left standing near the radio, with his last word lingering in the air. Charm—I must have charm on the brain this morning, he thought. Charm on the brain, Stratford-on-Avon, water on the knee.

It was Molly McBain on the telephone. Gordon gathered that she wanted to borrow something for the afternoon's tea and that Janet didn't have it in stock. What Janet could supply, of course, was a full report on young Bruce's offer, and Gordon listened to it again, with interest. Janet did not embellish the episode. She described it exactly as it must have taken place, but instead of stressing its preposterous aspect, as she had the first time, Gordon thought she allowed a note of temperate jubilation to emerge. For one thing, she laughed with much more gusto than Molly's wit could conceivably warrant. Neither wit nor charm was among Molly's many amiable qualities; she was a year or two younger than Janet, but it would never enter young Bruce's mind to ask *her* to a square dance. And it occurred to Gordon that no young—or, for that matter, middle-aged—woman had asked him to a square or any other kind of dance for over twenty years.

As Janet talked on, Gordon wondered again what it was about her manner, approach, or basic attitude that enabled her to keep the children's companionship and confidence. He envied her those intimate gigglings in the bathroom, that command of current undergraduate slang. He felt that she had come between him and Carrie somehow, if only by demonstrating that a parent need not be heavy of manner or awkward in approach. He resented the gaiety of her telephone voice, her ability to build the little exchange with Bruce into full-bodied, happy entertainment. Janet was still talking when he went upstairs to his study, carrying the *Times.* He hoped she wouldn't follow him, though he felt certain she would.

All through his listless scanning of the front page, he expected her knock on the door. But Janet did not come. He heard her doing the breakfast dishes, and for a time she had some church music on the radio.

Gordon could not work up an interest in the day's news. He thought again about taking the Ewing papers out of his briefcase. He ought to get at them now, in the morning, while his mind was fresh. His watch showed eleven-fifteen. Dick Pratt would still be in bed, sleeping off the New Year's party he had chosen to attend. He had probably gone to the Corcorans', in Ardsley, and even now the Corcorans must be remembering the things he'd said and done. All right, Dick could damn well sink or swim on his own with Ewing v. Ewing. All right, if Dick really thought there wasn't any law involved, to speak of, he could damn well go and charm the twelve good men and true. And Janet could go and charm the McBains with her girlish adventures in Edgerton. Gordon turned the pages of the Book Review section and noted the extraordinary number of extraordinary works that had been published during the week.

At noon, Gordon went to the bathroom for a drink of water. The door to Alice's room was shut, but he thought he heard a sound inside, the sound of muffled crying. He went in. Janet was seated on the chaise longue, and she had a handkerchief to her mouth. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Janet," he said.

"Oh, Gordon."

He put his hand on her shoulder.

"I can't keep it up," she said.

"Keep what up?"

"About the girls. They're gone. It's just as you said. They're gone."

"You've been arranging their things?"

"I don't know why Carrie's taking Spanish," said Janet. "I don't know what they do. I don't know what they think about. They won't talk to me—not really."

"Why, I saw you putting your heads together every day they were here."

"I forced myself on them."

"You couldn't have. I heard you laughing and giggling. They showed you pictures. You fussed with them for hours over those dresses."

"You didn't pick those dresses," she said. "I did. And the girls only pretended to like them. I don't know what they like any more. You saw us together only when I forced my way into their company. Don't go back on what you said. You know they left this house every chance they got. This house means nothing to them. You and I mean nothing to them."

The flat despair in her voice made Gordon say, "Look, now, it isn't as bad as that."

"Yes, it is. It's been making you miserable all week, and the best I could do was to put on my Glad Girl act. I can't keep it up. It's too hard. I can't go on acting as if everything was all right. I don't fool you and I don't fool myself. *Or* the girls."

You did fool me, Gordon almost said. He kept his hand on her shoulder.

"I tried to talk their language. It embarrassed them. I could see. They thought I was pathetic. You did, too, didn't you?"

"No. Certainly not. They didn't either."

"Yes, they did. I tried to stop myself but I couldn't seem to find any other way to be. And it embarrassed them. Just as it embarrassed you to hear me go on about that stupid boy in the drugstore."

"It did nothing of the kind. I thought it was pretty funny, and so did you. It was."

"Funny? No. Ludicrous. I don't know why I can't act my age. Maybe if I hadn't tried to be the gay young thing, the girls wouldn't have shied away so. I'm tired. God, I'm tired. Gordon, they couldn't wait for the phone to ring. They went and saw a movie they'd already seen out West. How could we have lost them so quickly? Why?"

"They'll be back," he said. "This may be part of a process. Maybe they have to make the break this way or not at all."

She turned her face to the window. Her eyes were still dim. The sunlight made her face look dim, too, and faded, and forty-three years old. "They won't write us for a month now," she said. "I don't know why Carrie's taking Spanish."

"There's nothing wrong with taking Spanish. I was only trying to get her to talk."

"She won't talk. Neither will Alice. Not to us. Didn't you wonder why they left last night? Their classes don't start until the fifth."

"I thought it was the third."

"That's what they told us. But they're not going directly back to the college. They're going to stop off for two days' skiing somewhere in Michigan. I don't know where. I don't even know which of the boys they'll be with."

"You seem to know a lot more than I, at that," said Gordon. "What's this about Michigan?"

"They're going to stop off there for two days. And it's with somebody who owns a camp on some lake. I heard them talking in the bathroom, and that's all I did hear. I gave them every kind of opening to tell me more, but they never did. Why not? Were they afraid I'd ask about chaperones? Is there something wrong with the kind of boys they're going to meet there?"

"I wish you'd told me this before."

"I couldn't. I only found out yesterday myself. I couldn't tell you just as they were getting ready to leave. You'd've asked them about it point-blank, and that would've been the worst possible thing. They'd've resented us terribly for meddling."

"I certainly *would* have asked them point-blank."

"Then they would've been sure we don't trust them," Janet said. "They'd have clammed up all the more."

"I don't trust anybody aged eighteen. Or nineteen."

"It would've been the worst possible thing to put it to them point-blank. They're not children."

"Yes, they are," said Gordon. "And they should have gone to Vassar, where at least we could have kept more of an eye on them."

"You can't keep an eye on them from here to Poughkeepsie. What has geography to do with it? It's the girls. I must have made some dreadful mistakes with them somewhere along the line." Janet's voice broke. She put a hand over her eyes.

"You've done a wonderful job with them." Gordon was aware he had slipped over into the Glad Girl role, but he could think of nothing else to do. He hoped his tone had carried conviction. "They just didn't want to make us feel bad about losing the two days. Think of all the things you and I didn't tell our parents. All the things we might easily have told them and didn't."

He had taken his hand from Janet's shoulder, and now he put it back.

"It'll be a month before we hear from them again," she said. "Alice has been going out on dates with an English instructor who's fifteen years older."

"That's not the sort of thing I meant when I said I didn't trust them. I don't care if he's thirty years older. Little Alice can look after herself. You've watched her do it."

"This is such a big house now."

"It's a good house," Gordon said.

"Molly's boy writes her twice a week."

"I'll be interested to see how he turns out. I wish Molly all the joy in the world, but I doubt if she'll derive much of it from contemplating that boy's progress."

Janet blew her nose and wiped her eyes. "I don't want to go there for tea this afternoon," she said.

"Why don't you call it off?"

"Molly won't mind too much. I'll ask her over tomorrow. Today I want to stay here with you."

"Fine."

"We could do something," she said. "We could stain that bookcase. It's been sitting in the basement for months. We have the stain and the varnish. Why don't we do that? Then you'll be able to set all your books out and we can get rid of the cartons."

"Fine. Let's not start in till after lunch, though."

"I'll make you a good lunch if you'll come to the kitchen and stay with me."

"I'll stay with you," he said. "Once you get me down in the basement, I'll probably want to touch up those rust spots on the boiler, too. I could rub them down with some sandpaper first."

She blew her nose again. "All right. Why just touch them up? Between the two of us, we could repaint the whole boiler in no time. Remember how much we got done in that one week on Sixty-fourth Street? And we didn't know anything about painting then."

Sixty-fourth Street, in New York, was where the Turners had lived the year they got married. They had filled the small apartment with cheap, unpainted furniture. One or two pieces were still around; Gordon had recently built a doghouse with boards from some of the others. He thought it would amuse Janet now to be reminded of the deplorable experiments they had made in colors. He would find all sorts of ways to put her in good humor after they got started painting.

The bookcase and the boiler would take up most of the afternoon. Evening would be time enough to look into Ewing v. Ewing. Dick probably had it right—not much law was involved. All Dick wanted were some ideas on the general line to follow, and those would be simple enough to work out. You could safely leave the jury to Dick. Pratt for the charm, Turner for sound judgment and in time of crisis, Fry to bring the customers in, Burckhardt for routine.

Put Yourself in My Place

February, 1947

"In the lives of most of us is some one thing that we would not after the lapse of how many years soever confess to our most understanding friend; the thing that does not bear thinking of; the one thing to be forgotten; the unforgettable thing. Not the commission of some great crime: this can be atoned for by great penances; and the very enormity of it has a dark grandeur. Maybe, some little deadly act of meanness, some hole-and-corner treachery?"

It hasn't been more than two hours since I first read these sentences in "Zuleika Dobson." But now I have gone over them so many times I think perhaps I could say them aloud without looking at the book. Under ordinary circumstances, I probably would not have been struck by the passage, but it came much too close to something I did yesterday.

The first I saw of Adam Sheppard was last winter, not many days after I took the house I now live in. It's a big, ugly farmhouse, midway between the Suffern road and a forest that slopes up along the foothills of the Ramapos. To get from the woods to the home of my neighbor, Floyd Traven, you have to cross a large meadow, and that is what Sheppard did, twice a day. I used to see him from my upstairs window, a bulky man who wore nothing over his open-collar shirt, not even on the coldest February morning. He walked slowly, carrying an empty bucket to Floyd's, a full one on his way back into the woods. One day, I asked Floyd who the man was and where he lived.

"That's Sheppard," said Floyd. "He don't live in a house. He's built himself a little cabin out there, but he sleeps in the open, on the ground. He's touched. Ain't he bothered you yet?"

"No."

"He will. No harm in him, you know, but he'll talk your ears off if you let him. Just queer in the head. Remember all these stockbrokers used to jump out of the window and kill themselves in '29? That's when he come out here and built that cabin. I can't tell you if he was a stockbroker. You can't make out what he was. But he's got some money he lives off of. He owns about ten acre of land back there, all woods. I let him draw his water, and listen to him for five minutes at a time. You don't want to give him a chance to talk no longer than that. There's ways of letting him know you got work of your own to do. He won't mind. No harm in him."

Five minutes. I have yet to see the day when I'll get rid of Floyd himself in less than thirty. He's a very old man, a retired gardener, and he mows his lawn oftener than he bathes. The white stubble on his chin is invariably discolored by trickles of tobacco juice from both corners of his mouth. He can't hear any too well, so you have to stand fairly close, and that's not so good. I don't much like Floyd. I envy him his lawn and his beautiful gardens, but I have no respect for his opinions. I didn't accept his estimate of Sheppard; I was brought up in a town where they considered a man crazy for playing the oboe on Sunday.

"He's queer in the head, all right," said Floyd. "Ask anybody. No use of you inviting him in the house. He won't come. The way he's got it doped out, most of the trouble in this world comes from people living indoors, getting nervous. Claims he was pretty near dying of nerves before he got the idea. Dying of too much steam heat, he says, and watching the ticker tape. He don't watch nothing but the weather now. When it rains or snows, he spends the night under one of these pup tents from the other war. But mostly he just crawls in a sleeping bag on the ground, no matter if it's ten below. He'll talk to you all day and he'll play with your little boy if you'll let him. It's women he's got no use for. If he had a hat, which he ain't, he wouldn't tip it to your Mrs."

Floyd was wrong about that; Sheppard talked to Ellen before he talked to me. They met at the A. & P. in town, and he even accepted her offer of a lift. I watched him get out at the foot of our driveway, and it was the first time I'd seen his face. He had strong features, deeply marked, and a large, shaggy head that went well with his body. He didn't look much over fifty.

"Offhand, I wouldn't say he was crazy," Ellen told me. "He's undoubtedly a strange man. By no means stranger than Floyd, though, and a good deal more civil. He asked my permission to continue walking across our meadow to fetch his water. I don't see how he stands the cold out there. He can't be as healthy as he looks. Two or three times, he mentioned his 'condition.' It may be some nervous disorder, at that."

We never found out. Sheppard seemed to have been through hospitals and consulted a great many doctors, but he spoke of them all with eloquent disdain. His basic medical theory had been more or less accurately stated by Floyd: Stay away from steam heat, rely on your own exertions, depend on no one, get plenty of fresh air, and you'll be all right. Nevertheless, his "condition" persisted. He blamed it on things he'd done or failed to do during the first thirty-eight years of his life, and said he could always bring it under control by a long walking trip. He told me he had once walked to Maine and back, a distance of more than a thousand miles. In March, he disappeared for the entire month; his itinerary covered a hundred and fifty miles up the Hudson to Saratoga Springs and two hundred on his way down through the Catskills. The day after he got back, he stopped to greet me in front of my garage, and he certainly didn't look any the worse for wear. He apologized for not having said goodbye. "I started out before sunrise and I figured you must have been asleep. Ever do any walking?"

"In the Army," I said.

"That's marching. Best part of walking is you can stop anywhere you want and study the land. Are you an atheist or a believer?"

"Neither."

"An agnostic?"

"No," I said. I had just finished Simonizing my car and I was pretty tired.

"I used to be an atheist," Sheppard said, "until I read a book not long ago. It was written by a man eighty years old, Morrison by name. This man'd been president of the New York Academy of Sciences and he proved to my satisfaction that there is a God. You can order the book from any big store. I'd lend you my copy if I hadn't gone and lost it. I won't buy another. I don't have to. I remember everything in it. For instance, how much do you know about wasps?"

"Just enough to keep away from them."

"Study the way a wasp lives and you'll believe in God. A female wasp will take hold of a grasshopper and cripple him. Not kill him, mind you—only deprive him of the power to move. She'll take this grasshopper and store him in the hole where she lays her eggs. She'll place the eggs so that after the young wasps hatch, they'll be able to dine off this living grasshopper until they can fend for themselves. Dead meat, you see, would kill the young wasps. If they'd been placed near the grasshopper's vital parts, they'd kill him right off and perish soon after. Can you see the miraculous wisdom of it?"

"I can. But I wouldn't like the job of explaining it to some grasshoppers I've known."

"So you've known some grasshoppers," said Sheppard. "Ever know any salmon?"

"I've eaten parts of many."

"A salmon will swim thousands of miles, across the ocean and around. Spend years doing it. But he'll always come back through the same river to the little stream where he was born. Take him out of there, put him in another little stream exactly like it, and he'll travel back to the main river, fight his way up again, and find his own stream. Furthermore, he'll end up on the same side of the stream he was born on. How can you account for that?"

"I can't."

"Eels," he said. "At breeding time, they start out from all over Europe and America. They meet in the deeps around Bermuda. They perform their functions and perish. How do the young eels know where their parents came from? For a fact, they do. You'll never find an American eel in Europe or a foreign one here. They not only go back to the same shore but seek out the same bodies of water. God has even granted the European eel a longer span of life, so it'll be able to make the crossing. If not God, who else? Don't answer me now. Think about it."

As Sheppard talked, he shifted a full pail of water from one hand to the other, without ever placing it on the ground. That was to tone up his muscles, he said.

"Twenty years ago, I couldn't have carried this pail from here to there without resting. I was like a million other people in New York, going back and forth between my home and my office. I might just as well have been on rails, like a shuttle train. I'd go to the office and watch the ticker. I didn't know it then, but I was watching my nerve fibres, tearing them off, and throwing them into the wastebasket. Somebody'd swim the English Channel, come riding up Broadway, and the office boy would take these nerves and toss them out of the window. What did I care?"

In April, we had a fall of snow. Sheppard came over and spent the day in our meadow, making a ten-foot snowman for my son. Jimmy brought out some coal in a sand bucket and we stood by while Sheppard put in the eyes, the mouth, and a row of buttons.

"Coal," he said. "A blessing to industry, a curse to man. People will heat their apartments with it to the temperature of a steam bath. Then they come out into the frost and expect their nervous systems to stand the shock. They go through the winter having one cold after another. Will they give their bodies a chance to develop resistance? Ho, no. Not they. You wait a thousand years or so. The city of New York will be under a plastic bowl, air-conditioned, and people will have heads the size of this snowman's—all brain, no body. Maybe they'll be human beings. Not for my money."

Sheppard placed the last two lumps of coal on the snowman's shoulders. "An admiral," he said to Jimmy. "You go to work on a Navy ship and he can order you around, make you do anything he says. Stay on land and you can thumb your nose at him."

Jimmy thumbed his nose at the snowman. "Is an admiral bigger than the world?" he asked. It was a version of his question of the week. Ellen had presented him with a revolving globe, and he was obsessed with the idea of it.

"None of us is bigger than the world," said Sheppard. He turned back to me. "Maybe people will learn that before it's too late. I doubt it. You can't control the elements. These lumps of coal, now—they stand between the city dweller and the elements. In a thousand years, he won't bother with the coal—he'll have his bowl of plastic. But somewhere along the line there'll be a slipup and he'll be as helpless as King Canute against the tide. You can't buck the elements. You can use them, bend with them, but you can't buck them."

Mary Jo, our nurse, came out and took Jimmy away to have supper. I thanked Sheppard for the snowman and asked him in for tea.

"The pleasure was all mine," he said. "I don't go into steam-heated houses."

"We could open the porch window."

"And I don't drink hot beverages."

"We could serve yours cold."

"Much obliged, no. It's pretty near sundown. I have to be getting along."

Ellen and I had our tea without him.

"Mary Jo doesn't like your Mr. Sheppard," she said. "In fact, she's developed quite a violent distaste for him. She says he's been teaching Jimmy to thumb his nose."

"Jimmy started thumbing his nose before we came here. He'll stop. Some bigger kid will hang one on his chin."

"I know. It's just that she doesn't approve of *flâneurs* in general. It revolts her to see an adult playing with snow all day."

"He built a hell of a snowman. Best I've seen."

"Mary Jo's talked to him only once, but apparently he mentioned his 'condition.' Now she's worried it might be contagious. I wouldn't be surprised if it was something organic. Remember Monday, at the post office, he told us the doctors were trying to get him operated on?"

"I wasn't listening," I said. "He looks healthy enough to me. You can't go giving a Wassermann to everyone Jim meets."

"You think of him as a kind of road-company Thoreau, do you?"

"No. The truth is I have no working hypothesis of any kind about him. What Mary Jo really objects to is his bachelorhood. She's always looked on that as a form of sabotage."

"Thoreau wasn't much of a hand with the girls, either," Ellen said. "I don't think there was anything very interesting between him and Emerson's aunt. I bet he could have walked our friend into the ground, though. For all that rugged talk, Mr. Sheppard doesn't strike me as being exceptionally healthy. His eyes are too bloodshot. I can't help feeling terribly sorry for him. He must be lonely. Floyd says in the old days he would never have stopped to chat with a woman. Now he's ready to make small talk every chance he gets. I'm sure he's been made to feel the whole town's against him. We must ask him in sometime after we've turned off the heat."

We did ask him, several times, both separately and together. He declined with ponderous courtesy. The last excuse he gave was so obviously far-fetched that I told Ellen not to press him again. It seemed as if he viewed the act of entering a man's home as some sort of commitment. But within his reservations he remained cordial and communicative. He taught Jimmy the names of trees and birds. When summer came and the barks were juicy, he made a flute out of a willow branch; it had four stops and it was the first musical instrument that had ever held more than passing interest for our boy.

Sheppard went to the post office once a week. Sometimes he rode with me in the car. One day, after I dropped him in our driveway, he leaned against the top of the car and told me about his father and mother. They were still living, in Texas.

"My father could have been a pretty decent man if she'd let him. But even water'll take a longer time to boil if you watch it. My mother watched my father until he just naturally shrivelled up into nothing. She kept tabs on all his doings. When he came back from a business trip, he had to show her his ticket stubs, hotel bills. Come every night, she went through his pockets. After lodge meetings, she waited till he fell asleep and then she'd go sniffing at his false teeth for signs of liquor. Woman hasn't been born going to watch me like that. She's a wheel-chair invalid now, but she's still keeping tabs on him and my sister, both. Sister runs the house for them."

Sheppard wiped the dust off my windshield with the sleeve of his shirt.

"I calculate I owe my sister a lot for looking after those two," he said. "Six years ago, I paid her fare to New York and back—both ways—and I paid a woman to take her place for eight days. My sister came up and I showed her the town. I put on my city clothes and I took her all around. I took her to Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe night club. She saw a city of seven million people killing themselves by slow degrees and—I'll be honest with you—she liked it. My sister's an ignorant woman, but I have to give her credit for taking the burden of those two invalids off my shoulders. I paid her fare both ways and I'll do it again sometime."

In the fall, I took a trip myself. I was away for most of three weeks. After my first dinner back home, Ellen said, "Your friend has missed you. He hasn't been by to see me at all. Do you suppose the sight of a pregnant woman offends him? We met at the hardware store and he was almost ostentatiously delicate. He stops in the meadow, studying the horizon for signs of you. You're mistaken in thinking him so self-sufficient. I believe he's desperately lonely. Why don't you look him up in the woods tomorrow? He's asked you to, hasn't he?"

I went up there about noon. I found Sheppard's place without having to look for it; he had beaten himself a good path into the forest. Only a few square yards of ground had been cleared near his cabin. For the rest, it was surrounded by a fine stand of timber—a birch grove in front and oaks on either side. His tent was pitched between a low stump and a neat brick fireplace. Smoke curled out of the cabin's field-stone chimney.

Remembering that he had built the cabin without previous experience in construction or benefit of qualified advice, I was surprised to see so well made a structure. He couldn't have known of my intention to visit, but all the furnishings of the single room—the tools, the books, the dishes—were arranged in the planned, self-conscious orderliness of a barracks ready for inspection. Over the mantelpiece, he had a lithograph of the Bonhomme Richard and a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt.

I think he was a little embarrassed at my having found him indoors; he hastened to explain that he had just been heating water for a sponge bath, and before I could glance at the titles of his books, he had me outside in the moderately cold air. He brought me his only comfortable chair to use, however, while he sat on the stump. Also, he gave me an apple.

People have to undergo fairly drastic physical changes before I take notice. Only after Sheppard told me he'd been to a doctor did I observe that he wasn't looking well.

"A medical man," he said. "A cut-throat. He's been at me to have this operation for eight years, if a day."

"Maybe he's right."

"Anything you can live with for eight years, you don't need an operation. Those fellows will go to any length to make a dollar. Take the summer before the war. This fellow was charging me five dollars a visit. He looked me over and he was all for driving me to the hospital in his car. Said they'd have a bed made up and ready for me and the operation would be performed next day. An emergency? So he thought. Well, sir, I walked the fourteen miles back here under my own power. Does that sound like a dying man to you?"

"No."

"I came back to this identical stump and mulled it over. Next day, I walked down to your house. Big family living there, Holmquist by name. They had a boy baby four months old. Mrs. Holmquist was hanging out the wash. Baby was crying. Tell you what I did. I lifted him out of his carriage and held him against my chest, like this. Warm baby. Four months old. He put his face into my chest here and went to sleep. All the time Mrs. Holmquist was hanging out the wash, I held him. Now, holding that baby did more for me than any operation could have. There's a lesson in that I want you to learn and pass along. End of the day, I slept ten hours. I didn't need any butchers cutting into me. I was going with nature, not against it."

This winter, I saw more and more of Sheppard. Shortly after Christmas, I got up one morning to find he had shovelled all the snow out of my driveway. For the exercise, he told Mary Jo, who had kept Jimmy from joining him.

"And I told him," she said, " 'Exercise ain't what you need. The way you look, you ought to be in a hospital with the prettiest nurse in the state.' "

I didn't know about the nurse, but I agreed with her about the hospital. Sheppard had lost weight, perhaps as much as thirty pounds. The skin had loosened on his powerful face; he looked old. He talked about the possibility of an operation frequently, now, and for the first time I realized how utterly terrified he was. He grappled with the idea of a visit to the doctor weeks in advance. His language, frequently tortuous, grew tortured as well, and his jauntiness of manner collapsed entirely. He started to make a new snowman for Jimmy but had to give it up; he couldn't bend from the waist.

Ellen had our baby in New York. I drove back from the hospital at five in the morning. Sheppard was waiting. He must have been standing outside the door for hours, because his hair was covered with frost. He still refused to come inside.

After he congratulated me, he said, "If you need any money—I know how it is with young couples—I could let you have some money if you need it."

I had to say no repeatedly, and then I had to promise I'd call on him if necessary.

Yesterday, I brought Ellen and the baby home. Sheppard was on our front porch. Even in my rather distracted state, I noticed he looked miserable. Mary Jo took the baby while I helped Ellen. Jimmy was at his grandmother's. After we had Ellen in bed, I came down to get the stuff from the car and Sheppard was still on the porch. I guess I was short with him. I could hear the baby crying upstairs and I didn't know if Mary Jo was handling her properly.

Sheppard said he, too, would be going to the hospital in the morning. The doctor had insisted, threatened to drop his case. Maybe they'd operate, maybe they wouldn't.

"I don't much care now," Sheppard said. "If he doesn't kill me, these pains will. I want to hold that new baby of yours. I could stop her crying. I know how. Let her put her face in this old chest and she'll fall asleep like a top."

"I'm afraid we'd better not do that," I said.

"Let me hold her awhile. I'm going to the hospital tomorrow. Maybe if you let me hold her, I'll be all right."

"She's just a new baby. We'd better let Mary Jo handle her."

He followed me into the heated house. He begged me—there's no other word for it. Great God, I couldn't let him hold that baby. I hadn't been permitted to hold her myself until yesterday. For ten days, I'd been looking at her through a window. How did I know what his illness was? He'd never told me.

I knew he was clean. I knew he took sponge baths and kept an orderly cabin. I knew how his irrational, enveloping terror of the operation had shattered what confidence he had slowly regained in the long years of solitude. I knew he considered me his only friend. I knew all that. But she was my baby and I wasn't going to let him hold her. I didn't care what it did to him.

He begged me, cried a little, begged me again, and then he went away. This morning, Mary Jo saw him in his city clothes, taking the bus. No walking the fourteen miles this time. What a fool he'd been not to go through with that operation when it might have helped so much. What earthly good would it have done him to hold a new baby? I keep going over and over these things.

The Light across the Hill

April, 1947

My point is not that the universe is under some special obligation to me, Constance Joachim. I don't recall ever believing that a good time will be or even should be had by all. I'm a doctor's daughter, and I've passed through my father's waiting room too many hundreds of times to have remained ignorant of "undeserved" suffering. But because my father was what he was, and because my mother was what she was, I seem to have grown up with the assumption that the world, or at least the familiar part of it, provides almost fair returns for services rendered. Now I wonder if my failure has been in not rendering the services or in not recognizing the fairness of the returns; possibly in both. Possibly it's my time of life. I'm on the verge of becoming thirty, and this, I'm told, is the moment when many women of my station in life begin to ask the same old, insufferably banal question: Is this all there is to it?

I think of how a woman in Poland, say, or on Okinawa would regard my situation and I'm properly abashed. But what good is thinking of that? I'm not a Pole or a—whoever inhabits that island. I'm an American, born in the city of New York, and I now inhabit the town of Edgerton, not too many miles from my birthplace. My husband's name is Mark. He's a fine man and I love him. My daughter's name is Aggie, she's four years old, and I love her, too. We own a six-room house and ten acres of attractive land, which has a wooded hill on it. Two years ago, Mark bought the practice of the second-best dentist in Edgerton, so now he has nearly as much work as he can handle. It is not a very lucrative practice, but we get along. We can't afford a maid or a new car, but we've been paying off the mortgage on our property.

Aggie is lovely. She's in the basement now, and Mark is teaching her to rollerskate on the concrete floor. They're such precious people.

About once a month, Mark and I get a sitter and we go in to New York to spend the day. Sometimes we hear an afternoon concert at Town Hall, have dinner with a married couple we know, and see a play. It's usually three-thirty in the morning when we get back to Edgerton, but it's worth it. And once a week we drive to the county seat to see a movie. There's little by way of entertainment in Edgerton. It's not much more than a place where the neighboring dairy and chicken farmers come to do their shopping.

Yet I suppose for its size Edgerton is a substantial enough community. It is clean. There are several pretty houses and two big ones. The biggest belongs to Harbig, the older of the town's two doctors. In local terms, he's a rich man, and for all I know he made his money here. I once had the presence of mind to put the watch on his wife; she talked for eighteen minutes, straight, about the price of butter. Her husband is the kind of general practitioner for whom my father used to reserve his most sonorous invective. I doubt if Dr. Harbig has ever so much as removed the wrapper from a medical journal. I wonder how as conscientious and skillful a dentist as Mark can be so indulgent about him.

Have I guessed what you're thinking? About my comparing Mark to Father? That's not it. I think Mark's fine. And I'm not protesting too much, either.

There's this about him: I wouldn't say he was especially sensitive to moods. And in his profession, and with me in the house, it's just as well he isn't. He's so beautifully adjusted himself, so manlike (I have an unaccountable distaste for the word masculine), that he doesn't readily sympathize with arbitrary malaise. This hardness, which I've never seen lapse into cruelty, was what first really attracted me; still does when I encounter it.

Mark is contented here in Edgerton. He likes his work at the office and does a great deal around the house and grounds. It's the house he was born in, and he's very much part of it. All the time I've been here, we haven't had to resort to a single electrician, mechanic, or plumber.

Mark has his meals home, and he hasn't been captious about my too simple cooking. After six years of married life, I can recall no serious quarrels that weren't quickly and understandingly resolved. Neither of us is given to bickering. Mark was called into the service before Pearl Harbor and we made a go of living at a series of Army posts, some of them quite primitive. Aggie was born in a station hospital and weaned in a Quonset hut. I can't tell you how we looked forward to a place of our own. After Mark's mother died and left us this house, we spent most of our evenings making plans for it. We saved our money to buy the practice.

And now, in retrospect, it seems we had a good time. In retrospect, it seems I always, with the exception of my fourteenth year, had a good time. Father lectured in neurology at Columbia; we lived near the school, and our house was filled almost daily with people who interested and amused me and whom I interested and amused—at least, I thought I did, which was just as satisfactory. And, unlike many wives, I didn't find Army posts dull or filled with too many frustrations. People came and went; friends were promoted or not promoted; bright new fiancées arrived, eager for advice. And Aggie presented no very real problems. She was a marvellously happy baby. She flourished then and she's flourishing now. I find her enchanting. But she and Mark, however dear, are only two people. Apparently, I need more—and not elderly ladies who can talk about the price of butter eighteen minutes at a stretch.

The time I fully grasped what the nullity of Edgerton had done to me was a year ago, when I found I had begun to follow a whole string of those unspeakable soap operas. Appalling enough. But then "came a day," as the radio narrators say, when I walked into a drugstore and heard myself asking for a product plugged by one of the programs; I heard myself asking for a product that would beautify my hands.

Something else happened. Our neighbors, the Craigs, moved in. Their name is not Craig. I will have to call them that because their real names are familiar to you and to several million others. The

Craigs are a theatrical couple. They do not occupy quite the position that Lunt and Fontanne do on the legitimate stage or Clark Gable and the late Carole Lombard did in pictures. For all that, they are famous. They have done a few pictures, but mostly they've appeared in plays together. They're famous and very good. I have never sat through one of their plays without thinking that they must be not only gifted performers but intelligent, likable people, a shade too clever, perhaps, but in the nicest possible way. Onstage, Marcia Craig has a special quality of gay detachment that doesn't seem to disrupt her identification with the role. And Robert Craig, who still can't be much over forty, was already a kind of matinée idol to those of us who, at college, made a great point of not swooning at the sight of the pretty boys.

In the only interview they granted to the county press, the Craigs said that for a long time they'd been meaning to take a full year's rest. Robert Craig explained their choice of Edgerton. He said they'd taken a fancy to the house, which I must say is extremely attractive. Its graceful drop roof is visible across our little hill. The distance from New York was just right for them, he said. Only their best friends, people they really wanted to see, would come this far. Their Connecticut and Long Island acquaintances would have still further to travel, and the Bucks County folk, too, were at arm's length. Besides, his wide added, Robert had just inherited exactly the right kind and amount of furniture for a nine-room country house.

"Truly," she said, "we're not putting on the dog. But during our first week here we had forty or fifty children stopping by for autographs. Some of them came three or four times. And they don't show any signs of letting up. We'd be terribly grateful if they would. Is there any way you could phrase that without making me sound objectionable?"

The newspaper printed the request verbatim. She had made her point tactfully and for everyone to see. But the children kept coming, and the old Negro couple who ran the house didn't seem to be able to handle them. Marcia Craig asked the coöperation of the P. T. A. in what I thought was a friendly and appropriate letter, and although it occasioned some criticism (what doesn't, in Edgerton?), it did the job. After that, the Craigs were left pretty much to themselves, by, at any rate, the local people.

They assuredly did not lack visitors. There were sometimes as many as four or five cars parked under or near their porte-cochere. The cars looked expensive, and so, from what I could observe in passing, did the people. More often than not when Mark and I returned from our trips to New York, the Craigs' lights were still on, and I don't mind saying I wished we had spent the evening there rather than with our own friends in the city. I didn't envy the cars, or the outside paint job that the Craigs could afford and we couldn't, or the old Negro couple, who managed to keep the place in such excellent shape. But our monthly trip had begun to assume a character both too eager and too perfunctory. We—or at least I—tried to crowd too much into it, tried to see too many shows, recapture too many old and irretrievable associations. The Craigs sat in their country house, and their world, or such representatives of it as they cared to receive, came to them.

Many of their doings, decisions, and plans turned up in the gossip columns. After a season in London, a long tour, and a picture engagement in this country, the Craigs were rusticating. They were reading somebody's script. They were considering a revival of Shaw in the fall. Korda wanted them for this or that. And what Marcia Craig, at the age of seventeen, had said to George M. Cohan—garbled, I'm sure, or apocryphal.

My preoccupation with the Craigs was, of course, a commentary on my own life. In the middle of the night, I'd get up to adjust the blankets over Aggie; the Craigs' lights would still be blazing across the hill. In the supermarket at Edgerton, I would follow the Negro cook's progress along the shelves and notice what she bought. I let a roast burn on the Sunday that Marcia Craig interrupted her year's rest to appear on a broadcast.

Once, she came to the supermarket herself. She's a strikingly beautiful dark woman, not so tall as she looks on the stage. She bought two jars of olives and a loaf of bread. Among the people who recognized her was a hideous, toothless old man who lives off the fact of his being a veteran of the Spanish-American War. Before that day in the supermarket, I had seen him only in front of Iversen's saloon, wearing a soiled V.F.W. cap and staring at passersby with that deadly, vacuous, yet inclusive small-town stare. At the market, I was behind him when he recognized Marcia Craig. He turned to young Freddie, the clerk, and in a voice that certainly carried to Mrs. Craig he said, "Maybe she ain't good enough to eat, but she's good enough. You know what I mean?" And he actually nudged Freddie with his elbow. Freddie pursed his thin mouth with much the same delicate air that the Cardinal de Retz might have assumed in response to a dangerous but amusing sally of La Rochefoucauld. The generations of Edgerton had met on common ground and seen eye to eye.

In another five years, Mark had told me only the night before, his practice ought to be solid and dependable. Five years in Edgerton, and perhaps ten years after that, or twenty. Or forty.

Nothing could have better defined the enormous gulf between Edgerton and Marcia Craig than that incident with the old man. Naturally, she ignored him and walked past us without change of expression. If she had noticed me at all, it would have been as part of a group of Edgerton people. And isn't that, when you stop to think, precisely what I am? Edgerton is to be my home for years to come. In a way, it's her home, too. One difference is that when she gets tired of it, she will go to London or California. When I get tired of Mrs. Harbig and the price of butter, I can go across the road to Mrs. Quinn's and talk about the price of kerosene.

Two weeks ago today, in the middle of breakfast, Mark said, "Oh, I forgot to tell you last night. The Craigs asked us over for lunch next Monday."

"They didn't," I said.

"Yes, they did. Anyway, he did."

"How did that happen? Had you spoken with him before?"

"No. He passed by as I was locking up the office and he asked if I was Dr. Joachim and why didn't we come over for lunch Monday. Just being neighborly, I guess. What's so extraordinary about that? We have no communicable diseases that I know of."

"But after all this time. How did it occur to him? I mean why?"

"Why not?"

"My God," I said. "What will I wear?"

"Slacks or something? That's what she always has on around here. Don't take it so big, dear. He was just being neighborly. Nothing to get fussed about."

"But I am fussed." And I was. Even after I had thought about it, I felt elated and apprehensive by turns. If Robert and Marcia Craig had visited at my father's, I would have been very much interested, but that's all. In Edgerton, the land of Mrs. Harbig, I was grateful and happy. I thought up things to say and replies to make as if I'd been going to my first dance. I wondered how soon we ought to return the invitation. I promised myself I wouldn't talk too much about Aggie. We'd have to leave her with Mrs. Quinn.

Robert Craig had said one o'clock, and I'm afraid we rang their bell exactly on the minute. No one answered, and we had to ring again.

"Are you sure he said one o'clock?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm sure he said one o'clock."

After we had waited a few minutes, Robert Craig came to the door in a dressing gown over his pajamas.

"Mrs. Joachim—Doctor," he said, "will you ever forgive me? Can I disarm you by confessing I forgot? I always do these idiotic things. I rely on William, the colored man, to remind me, but he and his wife are gone to a funeral in Schenectady—some such unlikely place. Left us to our own obviously meagre devices. *Will* you be charitable and forgive me?"

"Gosh," Mark said, "we don't want to put you out. Why don't we all drive over to Forest Valley for a snack? I don't have an appointment until three o'clock."

But Craig led us in. They had an unexpectedly large living room. Craig kept saying how chagrined and foolish he felt, and Mark tried to revive the Forest Valley project. Marcia Craig, I gathered, was upstairs.

"We were up till all hours last night," Craig said. "A couple of young Navy officers came to see us. We hadn't seen them since a

U.S.O. trip we made to Hawaii. They brought some bottles of champagne and insisted on killing every last one. That's another reason I feel as fuzzy as I look. Will you excuse me while I put on a vast pot of coffee?"

He went out to the kitchen and returned with some halves of grapefruit for us. Later, he brought some cheese, jam, crackers, guava jelly, and the coffee; we had our lunch. We talked about Edgerton. Mark said we were sixty feet higher above sea level than Forest Valley. Craig told us about the number of false alarms turned in last year to the local volunteer fire company, which had elected him an honorary member.

He came to the point. He said, "Marcia and I have been thinking of making you an offer for your little hill. It would be the ideal place for a guesthouse we might build. Not so much for guests as for ourselves. One or the other of us starts acting all over this house, and the victim ought to have a refuge of sorts nearby."

"Well—" Mark started to say.

Marcia Craig came down the stairs. She wore a green, floor-length hostess gown, and she looked tall again, as she does on the stage. She said how do you do, Mrs. Joachim—Doctor.

"I had just got around to asking them about the hill," said Robert Craig.

"Not before I drink two cups of coffee in quick succession," she said.

We talked about the regulars who sat in front of Iversen's saloon. Mrs. Craig had seen Aggie on the tricycle. What a sweet child. Then Robert Craig asked about the hill again.

"I'm afraid not," I said. "The odd thing is we've planned to build on that hill ourselves. Not this year, perhaps, or next, but later on, when seasoned lumber is available."

I could feel Mark looking at me.

"In the meantime," I said, "it's a good place for Aggie to play around. It's away from the road."

"I hope you'll reconsider," Robert Craig said. "Marcia has her heart set on the location, and we'd pay a very fair price."

"Not under any circumstances," I said.

We stayed on for maybe ten minutes longer. I don't remember what anybody said; doesn't matter. I believe Mark knew vaguely how I felt. Nevertheless, when we were alone in our car, he asked if I had really thought of building on the hill.

"No," I said.

I drove him to the office. After we parked, he lingered in the car awhile. He said, "*I* forgot about a lunch date once. I stood up Colonel Perrin and he made me pull O.D. out of turn. That's a big living room they got there. What'd you think of her?"

"Not good enough to eat. But good enough. You know what I mean?"

Mark thought I meant something about the food. He said, "I could have eaten the rest of that guava jelly without any trouble, but the crackers ran out. You know, I'd bet you six cents half those teeth on her are capped. Maybe she'll break a few and we can make back what you lost us on that real-estate deal. Or were you being a shrewd little customer?"

"No," I said. "I just don't want them to have that hill."

The War for Tony

September, 1950

Walking home from the village, Mike Ruellan and his son picked a roundabout way that took them past the old sawmill, across the woods owned by their neighbor, Mr. Epstein, and along the course of a brook that barely missed their two acres of land. These Saturday afternoon hikes had been something of a ritual ever since Tony could, without exertion, walk the distance. Now, aged eight years and a week, he could have walked a lot farther. By jumping back and forth across the brook, he did in fact cover much more ground than his father. He was a sure-footed boy, not especially sturdy for his age but well put together and graceful. Mike watched him with pleasure as he balanced on the arch of an exposed root that spanned the little stream. Moving with great care, Tony stepped off onto a flat rock and froze into an oddly strained position. He put a warning finger to his mouth and called Mike to his side with a gesture.

"Look," he whispered.

Some fifty feet downstream, a long-legged, long-necked bird was dipping its bill under the surface. Leisurely, it drank the clear water, shifted from one leg to the other, preened its plumage, and flew off through the woods. Mike could not see it in flight for more than a second or two.

"What do you think?" he said.

"I think it was a little blue heron," said Tony. "I've never seen one before."

"Neither have I. It wasn't all blue, though. More white than blue. Still, it was some kind of heron."

"Blue," said Tony. "Blue, all right, all right. They're white when they're young and change in their second year. That's how old this one must be, in its second year."

"For a fact?"

"That's what your bird book says. I'll show you."

"Then it *was* a little blue heron," Mike said. "You can write the Audubon Society. I don't know that anybody's seen one around here."

"I hope they'll believe me. Dennis didn't believe me about the fox. He says I must have seen a dog."

Dennis was the Epsteins' chauffeur.

"They'll believe you."

"Oh, brother!" said Tony. "A little blue heron!" He placed two fingers in his mouth and tried to whistle, but he was too excited to manage it.

They had walked almost to the edge of the woods and talked of many things before it occurred to Mike that Tony had done remarkably well to recall the one detail without which the bird could not have been identified. Long accustomed as he was to the boy's extraordinary precision of mind, fresh evidences of it continued to fill him with a kind of loving awe. He remembered that since last winter he had had his bird book in a place where Tony couldn't possibly have got at it; the fact about the heron's plumage must have been stored away for a matter of months at least, stored away and swiftly produced at the appropriate moment. Yes, Tony had good reason to expect disbelief not only from the Epsteins' chauffeur and the Audubon Society but from any adult who had not known him for some time. Mike Ruellan thought, If only Anne had lived, if only she had lived to see Tony as he now was.

Anne had had less than five years of Tony. Someday, Mike thought, when I'm old and patient and full of high sentence, I'll be able to think of those years not as less than five but as more than four: Anne had had more than four of Tony's wonderful years. And she had known right along how wonderful they were.

Mike and Anne had tried to be no more than ordinarily fatuous about their boy. Time and again they had warned each other to keep their doting private. And more than once Mike had soberly, if without conviction, expressed doubts about Tony's being so very remarkable after all. But as Tony passed through nursery school and kindergarten, through the hands of a series of delighted teachers and one incredulous I.Q.-taker, expert testimony grew in volume and conclusiveness. Without being pushed by anyone, Tony was able to read quite fluently at four. At five and a half, he could follow printed instructions well enough to build a motor truck out of his Erector set; it ran. And at seven he read "Huckleberry Finn" over and over, with a grasp of its values on a level that startled even Mike.

Fortunately, in most ways he was like any other boy of his age. He took his mother's sudden disappearance almost entirely, and to Mike appallingly, in stride. He spent the month after the funeral at his grandmother's house. Then, when he came home, Cassie Bynum was there, and in a few days he stopped asking why. He didn't seem to notice the change from white to brown in the color of the hands that washed and fed him, stroked his hair, and polished his shoes. Cassie was there. And Cassie loved him; that he must have known.

Mike had often blessed the day when, stunned as he was, he thought of going down South to fetch Cassie. He had made the trip before he regained his controls and without much hope that Cassie could be made to leave Alabama, where she'd lived all her life. He went prepared to offer her more money than he could afford. But Cassie appeared to have been waiting for him. There were no small children in the family that was employing her at the moment, and she accepted as self-evident that it wouldn't do to have a stranger taking care of Tony. Cassie had looked after Tony for some months while Mike was stationed at Maxwell Field during the war, and she did not consider herself a stranger. She cried a little about Anne, and asked for a day to get her stuff together. "Mrs. Ruellan would have wanted me to come," she said.

Cassie Bynum had worked out beyond all reasonable expectations. She ran the house well, and she liked living in the country. She kept Tony warm when he needed to be kept warm, and saw to his entertainment when his own resources failed him. She did have a few ideas that had disturbed Mike when he first came across them; she was convinced, for example, that an onion, placed under a sickbed, would infallibly draw out the most stubborn of fevers. At the same time, she could obey doctors' orders to the letter, and she had nursed Tony through childhood disorders with tenderness and devotion.

Mike remembered the onion because Tony, walking beside him in the woods, came up with another of Cassie's ideas. He said, "Cassie thinks you can make rain fall if you hang a dead snake on a tree. That's cuckoo. So when I found a dead snake I gave it to her and she hung it on the little maple in back and sure enough it rained the same day. But it wasn't the snake had anything to do with it, was it? She's cuckoo."

"No, she isn't," said Mike. "She just happened to be wrong about the snake. But she's right about a lot of other things. Did you explain to her what really makes rain fall?"

Tony nodded. "She said maybe so, but she still thinks the snake had something to do with it. Will you tell her I was right?"

"If you like." Tony had probably been voluble, specific, and intolerably accurate in describing the origin of rain, and Cassie had probably not offered more than a feeble rear-guard action. At the moment, Mike felt that he had no reason to fret about Cassie as a potentially retarding educational influence.

As the woods thinned out and Mike caught sight of Mr. Epstein in the act of trimming a hedge, his mind turned on another influence that would have to be considered.

He said, "Cassie tells me you've been over to the Epsteins' just about every afternoon this week. Don't you think that's a little too often?"

"They said for me to come any day I wanted."

"Television?"

"Yes."

"You've been putting in too much time at it."

"Well, there's a couple of programs I follow," Tony said. "One of those mysteries and a Western."

"I wish you'd cut down. Spend more time outdoors now while the weather's good. Billy Tyler's father says the reason Billy didn't make the baseball team this year is that he spends more hours watching the games on televison than he does actual playing himself."

"I don't like to watch the ball games. I like these two programs. You would, too."

"I don't think so. If I thought they were any good, we'd get a set ourselves."

"Why don't we?"

"Seems to me we've been over that," said Mike.

"Heck."

"Anyway, cut down on the television."

"Heck," Tony said. "All right. Will you find me the address of the Audubon Society? I ought to get a prize for the heron."

"You should, at that. I'll give you a prize. I'll get you a bird book of your own."

"What kind? I want the kind you have."

Before Mike could answer, Tony was off to join Dennis in front of Mr. Epstein's garage. Dennis seemed to be waxing the new Cadillac, and chances were Tony would pitch in and help. For weeks now, Tony had been in love with Dennis, because Dennis spent all his free time rebuilding a jeep and he let Tony stand by and watch. Mike walked along the hedge, trying to think of some tactful way of phrasing what he had to say to Mr. Epstein.

Leon Epstein was a very old and very rich man. He was as old and perhaps as rich as Bernard Baruch, a former classmate of his at the College of the City of New York. Unlike Mr. Baruch, he was small in body and had no discernible interest in national or international affairs. Before he made the bulk of his money, as a manufacturer of electrical appliances, he had been a sailor, a jockey, a mining engineer, a rubber planter, and an operator of tramp steamers out of Batavia. After the Second World War, he bought the hundred-odd acres left of the once huge Vandercloot estate and devoted himself to transforming them into an agreeable place of retirement for himself and his wife. Mike had grown to regard his old neighbors with respect and some affection.

The Epsteins had a staff of six or eight people, but Mr. Epstein did all except the most strenuous parts of the gardening himself. The hedge he was now clipping ran to the corner of Mike's lawn.

"Hedge looks good," Mike said. "Thicker every year."

"This holly isn't coming along the way it ought to," Mr. Epstein said. "But I'm stuck with it for fair. Haven't been seeing you around."

"Late hours at the office." Mike noticed that Tony had already begun to help Dennis polish the car. "There's Tony," he said. "I'd like to think he was trying to work off some of his gratitude, but I'm afraid it's only that he wants to be with Dennis. I was still a little overwhelmed when I talked to you on the telephone last Sunday. I'd never dreamed they made such magnificent trains."

Last Sunday, the Epsteins had sent over, as a birthday present for

Tony, an electric train that must surely have cost several hundred dollars; it came complete with an elaborately equipped railroad yard, stations, water towers, tunnels, bridges—and a locomotive that smoked. Mike was speaking the truth when he said he'd been overwhelmed; he had also been a little troubled. The present was too lavish. For one thing, there was hardly room to set it all up, and once it *was* set up, Tony suffered every time it had to be torn down. It was too far out of scale with everything else in the house, with the occasion, with the other presents, and also with Mike's idea of neighborly amenities. Fond as he was of both the Epsteins, Mike had never thought of the relationship as more than, say, cordial. Most of his talks with them had been conducted, as now, across the hedge, and across the barrier of the forty- or forty-five-year difference in ages. He had not been prepared for so lordly a gesture, and he did not carry the burden of gratitude as blithely as his son.

"Almost too magnificent," Mike said. "Cassie has a time trying to tear him away for meals. You shouldn't have done it, sir."

"I didn't send it. My wife did."

"She really shouldn't have."

"She's having more pleasure with Tony than he'll ever get out of his train. Quite a boy."

"Yes, he is," Mike said. "I hope he won't be made to understand that too often and too fast. I'm afraid he accepted the train as no more than his due."

"And that's all it was," Mr. Epstein said. "If anything, less." He continued to clip the hedge. "My wife should have had a boy like that fifty years ago. Or any kind of boy. Or girl. Well, she didn't. So let her have a little fun with Tony, won't you?"

"I hope he hasn't been too much trouble this week," said Mike. "Cassie tells me he's been over almost every day."

"Trouble? *Tony?*"

"He can make an awful racket with a television set."

"Nonsense. He and my wife can look at that set by the hour. She enjoys his remarks a lot more than anything on the screen. She just sits around to hear what he'll say. Then she tells me at dinner. I don't remember what we used to do for dinner conversation before Tony showed up."

Mike was beginning to run short on tact. "The truth is," he said, "I'd just as soon he spent less time with television. I don't like the effect it has on children. Most of the programs are garbage, but it isn't only that. My generation was exposed to just as much foolishness in books, and so was yours, no doubt. It's the medium. Too many dimensions or something. Tyranny over the imagination. I don't know. Maybe it makes life too easy—would that be it? I've watched the damned gadget working on my friends' children and it seems to transform them into receptacles—passive. A book demands more active play of mind. You can close it, disagree, open it again, modify your views. I guess television can be stimulating, too. But the children I've seen merely sit there gaping. By the hour, as you say. They don't go outdoors, they don't do their schoolwork . . ." Mike stopped. He felt he had allowed himself to be carried away.

"You've got a point there," Mr. Epstein said.

"I don't see enough of Tony. By the time I get home on weekdays, he's almost ready for bed. We have the weekends, of course, but mostly he's on his own. Maybe I worry more than I should about what he does with himself. Mrs. Epstein has been so wonderful to him, I hope she'll understand about the television."

"Frankly, I think she'd rather have five minutes of Tony than the best years of Hopalong Cassidy's life. She can always say the set's out of order. She'll just have to find something else to attract him with. Maybe she'll start tinkering with a jeep, like Dennis."

Mr. Epstein did not stop clipping the hedge as he talked. Mike was astonished at the energy in those fragile old hands. Mrs. Epstein's hands were like that, too, old and capable, good hands for Tony to be in. What admirable people, Mike thought; they should have had children. There should have been a dozen grandchildren roaming Tony's woods. Tony's woods was what Mrs. Epstein had once called the beautiful stand of timber on her land.

Tony came over. "I polished the grille," he said. "You can't see it from here, but it's like a mirror."

"Thank you," Mr. Epstein said.

"You're welcome. A Cadillac. That's what I'll buy when I get some Jew money."

Mike wasn't sure he had heard right. "Some what?"

"Jew money. That's what you got to have to buy a car like that. Dennis says."

"Tony," Mr. Epstein said, "what is Jew money?"

"I don't know. A lot of money. A thousand dollars?"

"Did Dennis say where you could get hold of some?"

"No. I got eighteen dollars in the bank. Can I help you clip the hedge, please?"

"No, thank you. I'm almost finished. Next time, Tony."

"You better go and cut some of our lawn," said Mike. "That mangy part around the tool shed."

"Now?"

"Yes."

Tony was not enthusiastic but he went.

"I'm sorry," Mike said. It seemed like a silly thing to say, and he wished he hadn't said it.

"I'm the one who ought to apologize—for Dennis," Mr. Epstein said.

"Dennis is a damn fool. I think I'll tell him so."

"I wouldn't. He's a very good chauffeur. I don't suppose he'd be one if he had no opinions. I haven't inquired into them too closely. I might do that, though, one of these days."

"I'll go straighten Tony out," said Mike. "Maybe I'll do some inquiring into Dennis's opinions myself. Tony may be full of them."

"And don't worry about the television. I'll talk to Mrs. Epstein." He went on clipping the hedge.

Mike walked around the picket fence to the back of his own house. He couldn't see Tony in or near the tool shed. From the kitchen, the sound of Cassie's radio came crashing through the barberry and the forsythia: "Take the gag out of her mouth," said a slow, deep voice. "Well, Miss Worthington, did you enjoy your ride? Sorry we couldn't let you see more of the scenery. It's pretty country around here—

downright pretty. Our accommodations are a little crude, I know, but if they're not up to your standards, all you have to do is say the word. Say the word, Miss Worthington. . . . *I think you know which word I mean.* . . . Cat got your tongue, Miss Worthington? . . . We'll find that tongue, young lady, if it takes all year. . . . But somehow I don't think it will. No, I honestly don't. . . ."

The drawl continued, running through the long, immutable ritual of menace, dissolving at last into organ music and a singing commercial in behalf of a mouthwash. Inside the house, perhaps, Tony was listening, rooting for the arrival of Front Page Farrell, Richard Roe, the F.B.I., or Sergeant Doe of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The whole raucous sequence affected Mike as part of a gigantic assault, directed by men of cunning and great power. Get Tony Ruellan! they said; he's too free, too bright, too charming. Flatten him out, they said; mold him in our image, bombard him with garbage, ply him with fraud, saturate his air with evil. Get him at the homes of his friends. Get him at his own home. Get him every hour, on the hour. Get at him through Dennis, the chauffeur of his heart.

Mike had faced something like this about a year before, when Tony brought the word "nigger" home from school and at once tried it for size on Cassie. Straightening that one out had turned into a rather lengthier and more involved session than Mike had anticipated. Tony had wanted to know *why* there were people who disliked Negroes, and Mike had had to come up with a certain amount of history and some simplified economics. He hoped this time to deal with the Jew thing quickly and surely, not to lose it in too much talk.

He started in through the back door. He was going to tell Cassie to turn her radio lower, but she came out to the porch and began talking before he had a chance to say anything. She looked very much upset.

"Jocko got killed," she said.

"Jocko? When? How?"

"Right after you went for your walk. He worked hisself loose from the leash and he tried to run across the road the way he saw you go. He never knew what hit him, poor dog. That car must have been doing eighty, Mr. Ruellan. It was a green car, but that's all I could tell about it. Jocko was such a good little old dog, I—"

"Does Tony know?"

"Not yet. I dassent tell him. I was waiting for you to come home."

"Where is he?"

"Setting up his train in the living room."

"And Jocko?"

"I buried him, Mr. Ruellan. He was all mashed up to bits. I didn't want Tony to see him like that. He was such a good little dog, I feel all disencouraged about it. That car must have been doing eighty. Why didn't you let him go with you this time?"

"We didn't want him to chase the birds. Poor Jocko. Did you say anything at all to Tony?"

"No, sir. I couldna kept from crying if *he* started in, not now. Maybe tomorrow I could do it."

"I'd better tell him now," Mike said. "Now, before he misses Jocko."

"You want me to go in with you?"

"Thank you, Cassie, I think not."

He opened the door into the living room, but Tony wasn't there. Only a few sections of railroad track had been assembled and the cars were still in their boxes. Tony was upstairs, moving around in his room. By the time Mike got up there, Tony had an open book in his hand.

He looked up. "I'll mow around the tool shed after dinner," he said.

"It can wait till tomorrow or the next day," Mike said. He didn't know how to begin, but after a while he heard himself talking without any apparent hesitation. "Tony, Jocko got killed. A car hit him. He ran out in the road and got killed. Cassie buried him. She had to. The car was going too fast. It wasn't Jocko's fault."

Tony said, "She buried him?"

"She had to. He was dead. It didn't hurt him. It was just like going to sleep."

"But we won't have him any more?"

"We'll get another dog. Right away, Tony." I'm saying all the wrong things, Mike thought. Like apologizing to Mr. Epstein. "We'll get one just like Jocko."

"But I want Jocko." For a moment he struggled against crying, and then he looked as if he'd passed the crisis. "Can we call the other dog Jocko, too?"

"If you like. We'll go down to the kennels and you can pick him out. We'll go in the morning."

Tony looked at the open book in his lap, "The Wonder Clock." His eyes moved along the page, though Mike knew he wasn't actually reading. Without looking up, he said, "Are the worms eating him now?"

"No," Mike said. "Jocko can't feel anything any more. Nothing can hurt him now, worms or anything."

"How long before he's a skeleton?"

"It's hard to say."

"Is Mommy a skeleton now?"

Mike could feel the air rushing into his lungs. "No," he said, too loudly.

"She's alive somewhere, Cassie says."

"Maybe she is. I can't tell, Tony. I don't know."

"I don't want to meet her if she's a skeleton."

"You won't meet her. No chance of that. She's gone. She was like that picture in my room. Do you want me help you set the train up now?"

"All right," Tony said. He closed the book slowly. "What if they don't have a dog like Jocko? Can we get a boxer?"

"Sure. Any kind. You pick him."

"But I want Jocko." He started out of the room, brushing abruptly past Mike.

"We'll get one like Jocko. We'll get a puppy that'll grow up to be exactly like Jocko."

Mike followed Tony out of the room and down the stairs. Halfway down, he saw Cassie withdrawing into the kitchen and closing the door behind her. She still had the radio on. In the living room, Tony held two sections of track in his hands for a long, thoughtful time before, listlessly, he fitted them together. Mike got down on the rug with him and went to work at the other end of the track. The sound of another singing commercial came from the kitchen, this time a litany in praise of a breakfast food, tasty, crunchy, muscle-building, vitamin-irradiated.

A savage loathing for the happy, fraudulent voices rose in Mike as a physical sensation; it mingled with his contempt for Dennis and his hatred of the man who had driven the green car at eighty (make it sixty) miles an hour. For a moment (no longer than that) he saw these people as the skirmishers and vanguard of the forces marshalled against Tony. I'm the first line of defense, he thought, and all my fighting has to be done on Saturdays and Sundays. All right, then, it'll be done on Saturdays and Sundays; whatever happens, the bastards'll know they've been in a fight.

"Cassie," he called out to the kitchen, "will you turn that radio lower, please? Much lower."

At Jake's

NEVER TRUST A WOMAN

TEN YEARS ON A DESERT ISLAND

A GORGEOUS NUMBER

THE MAGIC HOUR

THE LEGS GO FIRST

Never Trust a Woman

July, 1939

The new cop looked in the door, glanced at the two customers standing in front of the bar, and waved to the bartender. "Everything shipshape?" he asked.

Jake made a circle with his thumb and forefinger.

"I'll be by again," said the cop.

They all watched him cross Third Avenue and disappear around the Seventy-fourth Street corner. Both of the customers were drinking cognac. One was bald, a man of fifty-five or so, and the other was a dark, smooth-skinned young man. They were friendly, well-behaved drunks, and just before the cop interrupted, Jake had been wondering if he ought to let them have one on the house.

"That cop, he's no good," said the bald one. "Never will be. Too much milk of human kindness. That's how I flopped on the same job. Too easygoing."

"I never knew you was a cop, Mr. Bokay," said Jake.

"Not a cop. A detective, a regular gumshoe. Back in Budapest. Wasn't I, kid?"

"That's right," the young one said. "Deputy inspector of detectives."

"You're both drunk," said Jake. "Budapest is a big town. Deputy inspector of police in Budapest is a big job."

"Deputy inspector of detectives," said Mr. Bokay. "Tell him, kid."

"It's God's truth. Deputy inspector of detectives in charge of a political squad. Now he's only superintendent of a house on Park Avenue, but twenty-five years ago he was the handsomest flatfoot in Hungary."

"Well, what do you know about that," Jake said.

"I know plenty," said Mr. Bokay. "I know I'm nothing but a glorified janitor now. I know you think I'm drunk, and I *am* drunk, and I know you haven't the intelligence to believe what I'm going to tell you now, but if I hadn't been too easygoing all my life—get this, Jake—if I hadn't been too easygoing all my life, there might not have been any such thing as the World War."

Jake looked up at his customer and down at the empty glass, then filled it with cognac. "On the house," he said.

"You don't believe me, do you?"

"No," Jake said.

"Tell him, kid."

"It's God's truth," the young one said.

"Were you really a deputy inspector?"

"That's not the important thing," said Mr. Bokay. "The thing that matters is that there might never have been a World War if it hadn't been for me, and now I'm a glorified janitor."

"Well, it's like this," said Jake. "I been tending bar for eight years, so I've listened to plenty of guys who claimed they won that war, but this is the first time I run into anybody claims he started it."

Mr. Bokay drank his cognac. "Be accurate, Jake," he said. "I never said I started it. All I maintain is that it might never have been started if I hadn't been too easygoing. If I hadn't gone too easy on a couple of cheap gumshoes on the night of June 27, 1914, I wouldn't be taking guff from fat tenants who don't like the sound of ashcans under their windows. Jake, you're looking at a man who wasn't more than thirty feet away from Archduke Francis Ferdinand when he was shot on June 28, 1914."

"In fact, you were sitting right on his wife's lap," said Jake.

"Not more than thirty feet, I say. Man, I've seen history in the making. If you had a brain in your head, you'd shut up and listen."

"I'm listening, but let me tell you I wouldn't if I wasn't making a living here."

"Fill it up," said Mr. Bokay. "The whole thing starts when I get this assignment to take four men and smell around the lousy town of Sarajevo a few days before the Archduke's visit. Routine. I take these four men and we check into different hotels. Try to contact the men from Vienna, but they're working on their own. Contact the local police. Routine. Claim they've got every anarchist hangout in town spotted. Claim they're getting daily reports on every nationalist of standing. I check and send the boys around. They check on the anarchists, check on the nationalists, check on the students."

"Check and double check," said Jake. "Seabiscuit by two lengths."

"So my boys come back, everything fine—anarchists fine, nationalists fine, students splendid. What the hell. Routine. Nothing to report, everything quiet. Two of the fellows come back stinking drunk. The anarchists are home making bombs, students are home doing homework. Yeah. Students. Never trusted them. Mind you, I send one fellow to the nationalists, one to the anarchists, two to the students. That's how much I trust students. But these two men come back stinkink drunk and what do I do? I let it pass. Take it easy. But stinking, howling drunk, I tell you."

"Tch, tch," said Jake.

"A couple of ignorant, small-bore gumshoes. Not stupid, you know. Just ignorant, like you, Jake. Play cards all day and drink all night when they're supposed to be working."

"I had a night job once in a speakeasy," said Jake. "Had to sleep all day to keep going. It's unnatural. Cascarets are supposed to work at night, not living human beings."

"So what happens?" Mr. Bokay said. "Next day I'm riding in the police car thirty feet behind the Archduke and what happens? He's killed. *He* is killed and his wife is killed. Who kills them? A student."

"Never trust a Jap," said Jake. "Two ships for one."

"So what do I do? I hand in a report of everything that's happened. Christ, I had to put it in about those two men getting drunk—fifty people must have seen them. What happens? I lose my job. And now I spend my days listening to fat tenants and talking to fat bartenders who think a duke is a football team from North Carolina."

"Say, I don't like it being fat any more than you like it being bald," said Jake.

"Take it easy," the young one said.

"No, don't," said Mr. Bokay quickly. "Don't ever take it easy. That's what was my trouble in the old days. Easygoing, live and let die. Not any more, though. I know better. Come around sometime and watch me make those elevator boys toe the line. Man, you don't see *them* come in drunk like those two lousy gumshoes. So that makes me what? A glorified janitor, that's what. Hundred and thirty dollars a month and two rooms in the basement.

"That don't sound so bad," said Jake. "I don't see where you got any kick coming. As far as I'm concerned, I never trust a Jap. Or a woman. Give 'em enough rope and they'll skip."

Ten Years on a Desert Island

November, 1940

When the Negro came into Jake's place on Third Avenue, there were four men drinking at the bar. They all looked at Jake to see what he would do.

The Negro ordered a beer and drank up as soon as Jake served him. Then Jake picked up the empty glass and deliberately broke it. He threw the fragments into a garbage can under the counter. The four men looked back at the Negro, who quickly ordered another beer.

Two of the men were garage mechanics from Seventy-fifth Street. The third was an interne from Bellevue, and the fourth a tire salesman some years out of Georgia Tech.

"My boy came home with a queer one last night," said the mechanic named Birk. "His teacher gave him a composition to do about who the kid would choose to spend ten years with on a desert island. Wouldn't you say that was queer? In my day they used to make you write about George Washington or how to make a kite—things like that."

"Who'd he pick?" asked Tucker, the other mechanic.

"Johnny Weissmuller. I tried to argue him out of it, but nothing doing. It's these Tarzan pictures. I tried to tell him it's only a movie, but he says the way that guy can swim ain't no movie. So I tell him if it's an athlete you want, why don't you pick one that's all around and not just a swimmer, but he says when it comes to all-around athletes he'll string along with Weissmuller."

"I guess he's not old enough to know it's a woman he'll be wanting," said Tucker. "If I had a boy that age, I'd kind of expect him to pick me. When I was nine I thought my father was the greatest man ever lived. Well, he wasn't, but I'll be damned if he didn't have it all over Johnny Weissmuller. My father could grow mushrooms twice the size of your fist in a little old cellar when we lived down Raritan Bay. That's the sort of man who'd go good on a desert island."

"Not in my kid's book," Birk said. "Today a man would have to swing from trees and wrestle with alligators to rate with his own son. I say it's the teacher's fault for asking that kind of a question. I swear I myself wouldn't know who the hell to pick."

"I do."

"Who?"

"I'd take Benito Mussolini," said Tucker.

The Negro finished his second beer and waited. He gave no sign of ordering a third. Jake broke the glass again and threw the fragments away. The interne and the salesman stood at the far end of the bar, watching Jake and the Negro and listening to Birk and Tucker.

"Why?" asked Birk. "Why in hell take Benito Mussolini?"

"I don't like him, that's why. All you have to do is look at him to know the fellow has never done an honest day's work in his life. It'd be a big pleasure to make *him* toe the line. I'd work him from sunup to sundown."

"How do you know you could? How do you know he wouldn't make *you* do the dirty work? He looks pretty hefty to me."

"He wouldn't stand a Chinaman's chance," Tucker said. "I wasn't a foreman on a construction gang for nothing. I know how to handle his kind. The dago never lived could monkey with me. I don't care if he's Primo Carnera."

"They're shifty though, don't kid yourself. Turn your back just once and there's the point of a stiletto sticking out of your chest."

"That's where my straw-boss experience comes in. I wouldn't *turn* my back. There's your answer. I'd just stand around and grin and make him work till he stood ankle-deep in his own sweat. No more speeches from balconies."

The tire salesman had been drinking beer, but now he switched to a double rye as ominously as he could manage. Jake had nothing to do. He wiped the bar in front of the mechanics. The Negro ordered again. This time he did not drink up, just nursed it. He was a slender, light Negro in a well-pressed suit, and he wore an American Legion button. The mechanics and the interne and Jake had all noticed the unmistakably threatening attitude of the man from Georgia Tech.

"On second thought," said Tucker, "I wouldn't take Mussolini, after all. Why the hell should *I* put in ten years of my life alone with a heel like that? Wouldn't be worth it."

"You see?" Birk said. "What did I tell you? That composition is not as simple as it sounds. Sweet Christ on a crutch, I could stand here all week and not figure out an answer. It's wrong for a teacher to make a boy rack his brains about something as useless as that. What do you say, Doc?"

The interne was not quite sober. He had a week of night duty ahead of him, and two months ago he had married a girl without the knowledge of his family. Now he was not certain he should have married at all.

"It's hard to tell," the interne said. "Conundrums like that are supposed to stimulate the imagination. There's a lot to be said for these new teaching methods. Don't the kids of today seem brighter to you than the ones you grew up with?"

"They do, that's a fact," Birk said. "But I'm not so sure it's a good thing."

"I'm all for it," the interne said. "If memory serves me right, half the time I didn't know what went on around me when I was a kid at school. It took twenty years before I could figure out what some of my nursery rhymes meant. Did you ever hear the one about the mouse that ran up the clock?"

"No."

"I did," said Tucker. "It went like this:

'Dickory, dickory, dock,
The mouse ran up the clock;
The clock struck one,
The mouse ran down,
Dickory, dickory, dock.' "

"The way I remember it," the interne said, "it's *'Hickory*, dickory, dock.' Anyway, it means life is nothing. Do you get it? The clock struck one, the mouse ran down, so what? So nothing. Life is nothing. You live and you work and you work and you live and it all adds up to nothing. Of course, as a kid I couldn't understand that. I probably don't understand it now."

Nobody said anything. The Negro finished his third beer and got ready to go. Jake took his glass and broke it.

"You get my point, don't you?" the interne said. "The clock struck one, the mouse ran down, so what? So nothing. Life is nothing."

"I get your point," the Negro said.

The salesman pushed his drink away. "Listen, you black son of a bitch," he said. "I've stood all I'm going to stand. First you come in and drink with white folks, then you get up on your hind legs and start talking bigetty."

The Negro said, "I'm going because I was on my way anyhow. But this ain't Arkansas. You meet me on the sidewalk and find out."

"I don't come from Arkansas," the salesman said. "I come from Georgia, where we don't soil our hands on apes. Only this time I'll make an exception. I know you bastards can run faster than human beings, so I don't aim to chase you down any sidewalks. Nigger, you going to get it right in here."

He was within two steps of the Negro when Jake leaned over the bar and hit him on the back of the head with a sawed-off baseball bat. He staggered against the wall and sat down.

"I got to go," the Negro said. "I got things to do. You tell him my name is Baxter and he can find me on the corner of a Hundred-and-thirty-first and Lenox any time he feels like. I ain't scared of him." He left.

The salesman's eyes were open, but he seemed to have lost his power of speech. Even after he staggered to his feet, he could only mumble. The interne took his arm and led him out. Jake and the mechanics watched the man struggling to get his bearings on the seat of a taxi. The hackie finally got an address out of him and drove off.

The interne came back. "You want to be careful where you hit these guys," he said.

"He'll be all right," Jake said. "I know just about how hard a one they'll take. You pick those things up as you go along. I just made him try that one on for size. I can't have no lush messing up my place."

"My own head isn't as clear as it ought to be," the interne said, "but it seems to me you yourself were asking for trouble when you broke those glasses."

"That's different," said Jake. "That's policy. I make my living off these men from the garage. They wouldn't drink out of the same glass with a colored man. I got to destroy them glasses so's they know I don't use them again. I can't help it if the colored man gets his feelings hurt. He ought to have better sense than to come here in the first place."

"Jake's right," Tucker said. "I wouldn't drink out of the same glass."

"All right, I'm a little groggy," the interne said. "I still don't see why you can't refuse them service when they come in."

"I just can't, that's all. He got a right to buy a drink in a public place, just like Tucker's got a right not to drink out of the same glass and I got a right to smash it. We all got to make a dollar and we all got a right to our own opinions. That's what they ought to teach them at school instead of making them worry about who to take on a desert island."

"The thing that got me," said Birk, "was that this kid of mine didn't worry or hesitate a minute. He just picked Weissmuller right off the bat. What's the use of working and slaving away for your family when they'd rather live with a complete stranger? Like the Doc says, you live and you work and you work and you live and where are you?"

"Nowhere," the interne said. "That's what I was getting at a little while ago."

"You guys sound like a funeral," said Jake. "I better turn on something cheerful." He tried several stations on the dial before deciding on a transcribed program of records by Kay Kyser and his College of Musical Knowledge.

A Gorgeous Number

October, 1942

Miss Garvey came into Jake's place by the Third Avenue entrance. She had stopped in a couple of times earlier during the day to see if her man was there. Now, after she had satisfied herself that he wasn't, Jake expected her to leave at once, as she had done before, but this time she came to the bar and ordered a whiskey sour. She took a high stool near the telephone booth, away from the other customers.

When he served her she said, "You wouldn't gang up on me, would you?"

"Not me," Jake said. "He hasn't been in here these past ten days, and that's the truth."

"Do you want to know what I think, then? I think he's gone back to his slew-foot wife, that's what."

"Mr. Fisher wouldn't do a thing like that. Not without telling you. Or me."

"I believe he would," Miss Garvey said thoughtfully. "I believe that's just what he's done. If I only knew where she lived."

"Maybe he's just off on a bender someplace."

"He never saw the bender he could keep up for six days. He's eased out for good. The way I know is all his clothes are gone."

"Maybe he's just taking time out," Jake said. "Men get so they want a stretch without no women around. Look at all these middle-aged guys trying to get in the Navy. Maybe that's what he's gone and done, joined the Navy."

"Him? Why, that man would get seasick if he saw a package of Life Savers. Him in the Navy? That man anywhere near a fight? Listen. Sam Fisher couldn't punch his way out of a paper bag if it was wet. What I could tell you about Sam Fisher."

"Don't say nothing you'd regret tomorrow, Miss Garvey. He's done a lot of talking in here, Mr. Fisher has, and he's never breathed a word against you. He's told me he was crazy about you until I was blue in the face. 'I need that girl,' he says."

"He needs me like I need spinal meningitis. He needs a legal dependent is what he needs. As a dependent, I don't rate with his draft board, so he's gone back to live with his own true love, that lady ape from Hackensack. What I could tell you about her."

"You don't have to," Jake said. "Mr. Fisher used to, years ago. He wouldn't go back to her, I don't think, and if he has, he'll be back in a hurry."

"He'll never be back, not him. Not while he needs a legal dependent he won't. I can tell by the way he's sicked his friends on me. Mr. Fisher has declared open season on Mae Garvey, and how the boys are coming around. They wouldn't none of them tell me where he is, but oh, how they're piling up the flowers and the candy."

"He wouldn't do a thing like that," said Jake.

Miss Garvey finished her drink and ordered another. "You should see the pack of them," she said. "What a mob of gate-crashing deadbeats. There's one of them been around every night for a week. He don't need to worry about the draft. He's fifty-five if he's a day."

"Well," Jake said, "my father was fifty when I came into this world."

"Your father. This chowderhead could be my grandfather. If you listen careful, you can hear his arteries hardening. I'd rather go back to hustling tables before I'd encourage that type of individual."

"You won't never have to hustle tables, not with what you got."

"Fifty-five if he's a day. Do I look like I was ready to take up with the first simonizer who throws a box of Loft's weekly special at me? 'I'm a man of seasoned judgment,' he says. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm ready to go back to Wisconsin and marry a farmer. At least I wouldn't have the rent to think about."

"You'll be all right," Jake said.

"With a belly down to here," Miss Garvey said. "A man of seasoned judgment. I must be seeing things. Look."

A midget had just come into the saloon. All the men at the other end of the bar were staring at him. He was not over three and a half feet tall and he was dressed in a well-tailored white flannel suit. He had sandy hair, slicked close to his round skull. He climbed up on the stool next to Miss Garvey's. His voice, as he ordered a small beer, was that of a grown man.

"What's the good word?" he said to Jake. "What you been doing?"

"I been consolidating my gains," Jake said, "and withdrawing to previously fortified positions."

"Seen any of Daisy Bryson around?"

"Not for a while," Jake said.

"Well, next time she's around tell her to ring me. I got a spot for her in a club downtown."

One of the men at the bar rapped for service.

"Excuse me, Major," Jake said. "I got to attend to them cuspidor marksmen."

After Jake left, the midget turned to Miss Garvey. He said, "They just call me Major. But the name is Driscoll, Thomas Driscoll."

"How do you do?" she said.

He sipped the beer. "What's that you're having?"

"Whiskey sour."

"You must sample one of my Major Driscoll Specials one of these days. Something like a Waldorf but with a touch of my own. All the gorgeous girls love it. They come back for more every time. I feed them a shakerful of Specials, but plenty of solid stuff along with it. A phone call to Sardi's and up comes more delicious stuff than they can eat in a week."

"Who?"

"All the gorgeous girls. I get them jobs all over town. No percentage in it for me, you understand. I just got plenty of contacts in show business and I use them. There's a lot of glamour boys would give their right eyes to have as many gorgeous girls visiting them like I got."

"I bet," Miss Garvey said.

"Here and there I get a bum who don't know what's good for her and tries to promote me. One girl came up twice, both times with her mother, and a couple of days later she rings me up—could I loan her seventy-five dollars? Hung up on her. Last week she comes crawling back—no mother, no mention of money, nothing. Here and there you get bums. But mostly they appreciate the right kind of treatment. Check on that if you want to. I live at the Hotel Monaco."

"Check on what?" Miss Garvey asked.

"Check and see if there ain't a lot I can do for gorgeous girls. You stop in there first chance you get and you'll be treated right. Everything on the up and up. Just ask for the Major. They all know me."

"Mr. Thomas Driscoll," she said, "at the Hotel Monaco."

"Call me Major. All my friends do."

"Major," she said. "Major Thomas Driscoll. And will you treat me right?" She began to laugh. "Oh, Major."

The little man watched her intently.

"Oh, Major. Will you love, honor, and cherish me till death do us part?" Miss Garvey laughed so hard and so loudly that Jake and all the men looked back. Her eyes were closed with laughing and she rocked from side to side on the high stool.

Thomas Driscoll jumped to the floor. "Don't get your wind up, Miss," he said. "I got better-looking girls than you sweeping my room seven days in the week." He turned and walked out of the bar with dignity, nodding to Jake as he passed.

Jake went back to Miss Garvey, who was still laughing so hard she didn't make any attempt to catch her purse as it fell from her lap.

"Oh, Jake," she said, gasping. "Him too. Oh, the Major. Wait till I tell you. Oh, my God."

The Magic Hour

May, 1942

After his fourth Tom Collins the young interne felt that his hour had begun. Often, though by no means invariably, when he got drunk there was an hour when many things seemed clear. If it had not been for this clairvoyant interlude, he would never have frequented Jake's saloon, because he found the taste of alcohol repugnant. As he ordered his fifth, he told Jake to put more sugar in it. Jake waited on him promptly. Business had been dull all morning and the only other customer around was an old man who sat in the middle booth.

"Dr. Kildare," said Jake, "I've always treated you fair and square, haven't I?"

"Sure, Jake."

"Well, do me a favor, will you? Take your drink and sit with the old Professor there, will you? If he don't have somebody to talk to, he'll fall asleep, and it wouldn't look right to cart him out to a cab. He's O.K. He's just got to have somebody to talk with or he falls asleep on the table."

"How do I know he wants me to sit with him?"

"He wants you, all right."

The interne owed Jake seven and a half dollars. "Very good," he said. He took his drink and started toward the middle booth. The old man sat there quietly nursing a beer, and he did not look as if he wanted company. The interne was about to turn back when the old man said, "Would you care to have a drink with me, sir?" He was a clean old man with a delicate face and thin white hair.

"Thank you. I would." The interne sat down. "I'm a little drunk, if it's all the same to you."

"So am I. You're Dr. Kildare, I believe."

"They call me Kildare here just as they call you the Professor."

"But I am a professor. Was, rather. Superannuated. My name is James MacDonald. Not so long ago, in a single county on Prince Edward Island, the census found four thousand people called MacDonald. That's one of those odd facts one gathers as a professor of economic geography."

"A professor," the interne said, "a real professor. I would never have thought. A full professor?"

"Quite full."

"Well, I'm not a full doctor. I'm just an interne. Sir, did you know that internes are not supposed to marry? Would that qualify as one of your odd facts?" The interne was thinking very clearly. The thing had been on his mind for some time and he wanted to talk about it with this interesting man now while he was still thinking clearly.

"Odd enough," said Professor MacDonald.

"And yet I *am* married. I'm married to a very beautiful girl. Did that ever happen to you?"

"I'm afraid not. My wife has always been plain, as I recall."

"Well, mine is very beautiful," the interne said. "That in itself wouldn't trouble me, but I just read in a book that no man who's away from home nights can expect faithfulness from a woman if she's worth anything. Now, I'm far from alone in thinking that my wife is worth a great deal. And I know how I would be if I had her opportunities. Therefore I'm troubled."

"I'm not so sure beauty has any special relevance to what you call faithfulness," the Professor said. "Wouldn't it seem that the real beauties are too sure of themselves to seek extracurricular reassurance? But then, I've never known a beautiful woman truly well."

"The point is I'm not truly well acquainted with my wife, either. We've just been married. I don't know anything about her. I don't even know where she is this very minute. Sir, will you excuse me while I try to reach her by phone?"

The interne went to the telephone and dialed his home number. He could hear the bell ringing, but there was no answer. This was his hour of clairvoyance and he could see his wife in a lot of places and with many different people under various circumstances. He hung up and returned to the table.

The old man had just started another beer. "Doctor," he said, "may I exercise the prerogatives of my age and of a friendship I feel for you? Will you not resent a word of advice? Don't worry. Worrying about things like that is a waste of valuable time."

"Time's not valuable," said the interne. "My own time is among the least valuable things in the universe. If you saw my pay envelope, you'd know that."

"Time is the most valuable of natural resources and you're wasting it worrying about young Mrs. Kildare," the Professor said. "Beginning with my retirement at the age of sixty-five, my entire life has been wasted. And Jake is wasting a lot of good water, letting it run out of the faucet that way. All around us there is waste. The city of New York consumes one billion gallons of water each day simply because no municipal administration has dared to sell it by meter."

Another regular customer came in and ordered a Scotch-and-soda at the bar. It was Mr. Angyal, who made his living as a streetcar conductor.

"If not for politicians, timid or crooked," said Professor MacDonald, "the water-supply problem of this city could be solved overnight."

The interne nodded. "When people first see my wife, they're staggered. Cabdrivers pull up to the curb for a closer look at her. Eleanor is very possibly the most beautiful girl going."

"Don't waste her then, Doctor. Please have some children. There is such a paucity of them among educated people. Did you know that the average graduate of Vassar is the mother of one-half of a daughter and the average Harvard graduate the father of just three-fourths of a son?"

"No, sir, I didn't. But Eleanor never did go to college. You can't really plan children, and I'm not so sure I would if I could. I'm not altogether sure I'd like to see a world devoid of chance. After all, it was by chance that I met her. In the Fifth Avenue bus, specifically."

"Oh, you're right. There is nothing like chance when the breaks are in your favor. I quite see your point. Where would the United States be today if the bison had not chanced to be the kind of animal he was? If the bison had been at all amenable to domestication, a great empire would almost certainly have grown up on the banks of the Mississippi thousands of years ago. And if soil destruction had gone on from that day to this just one-quarter as rapidly as it's going on at present, there wouldn't be enough of the country left to support a first-class power. I make this assertion on the authority of the United States Department of Interior. Sir, we would now be a third-rate power."

"Could be," said the interne. "But how can a girl be expected to stay alone six nights in the week? To my mind, *that* is the most criminal waste of natural resources in our century. Where do you suppose she is? She asked me to call her about this time. I think I'll try once more."

He went to the phone again.

Mr. Angyal turned halfway around at the bar and said, "Don't let him put one over on you, Kildare. Batty as they come."

The interne dialed and listened to the ringing until his ear began to hurt. Then he hung up and went back to the old man's table. "About the bison," he said.

"Mr. Angyal is angry at me," the Professor said. "I think it's because the other day I told him that in his capacity as a streetcar conductor he symbolized the passing of a historical epoch. Doomed to extinction. Angyal, the bison, and I. Anachronisms. Sir, I'm a planner in an unplanned society. And just when society would need me most, I'm mustered out of service. Why do you suppose some colleges automatically retire men at sixty-five? I'm a little beered up at this point, but can't you see where I'd be an exceptionally stimulating teacher when sober?"

"I find you stimulating as you are."

"Thank you, Doctor. I was hoping you'd say that. Men of my age must be particularly careful not to bore people with regrets or with tales of past glories. At the same time I can't resist telling you that in

Labrador there is a mountain range named after me by two appreciative students. Meager enough result to show for a lifetime of work."

"I find it imposing," said the interne. "I wish *I* could go home tonight and tell Eleanor I've just had a mountain range named after me. I don't believe I've made myself clear about her. That girl hasn't so much as a cavity in her teeth. She may not know where Labrador is, but in another walk of life she would have yachts named after her."

"I'm afraid I should not have let that slip about Labrador," the old man said. "It's no great distinction, really. That country has uncharted areas the size of Connecticut. All you have to do is go in there and come out with a decent map of a few lakes and streams, and the privilege of naming them is yours as a matter of convention. There would be certain physical hardships, of course, but adventure too, if you have the taste for it." He called to Jake and ordered another beer.

"Eleanor," the interne said. "is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen and the most beautiful that anybody I have ever seen has ever seen. I wish she were here, so you'd know what I was talking about. It's not in the cards that a man who works nights should be able to hold a girl like that. I may be able to hold her a year or two, but something or somebody is bound to happen sometime. I'm not given to prophesying doom, as you seem to be, sir, but I see things very clear between my fourth and sixth drinks."

Jake brought the beer, and the interne asked for another Tom Collins.

"Last week you told me never to serve you a sixth," Jake said.

"Can't you see I'm all right?"

"I ought to go by what you said last week."

"Never mind for the present," said the interne. "I have to make a call anyway." He stood up and went into the phone booth again.

This time his wife answered at once. "I'm so glad it's you," she said. "I tried to get you at the hospital."

"I've been ringing you myself."

"Oh, that must have been while I was in the shower. Darling, I love you so. All morning I've been wanting to tell you that. When will you be home?"

"Soon," he said. "Tomorrow, in fact."

"That's not soon."

"It's as soon as I can make it. How've you been?"

"Alone all yesterday afternoon, and then a movie, and then Cliff and Frank and Lew came up looking for you."

"Why should Lew be looking for me uptown? He knows where I am."

"Darling, don't be like that. You never talk like that unless you're high. Lew's all right."

"Sure. All wolf and a yard wide."

Eleanor laughed. "You're sweet," she said. "You're the sweetest thing in the whole wide world and I love you. Ask me why."

"Why?"

"Because you're the sweetest and the only man in the whole wide world. Will you be home early tomorrow?"

"I'll be home."

"Do you want me to come downtown for you?"

"Do that," he said, "won't you?"

They fixed a time to meet and talked about buying a new radio and said "I love you."

After hanging up, the interne stayed in the booth awhile, looking at the dial. He knew that his interval of clarity had come to an end. At least two hours of sleep would be needed before he went on duty again. He rubbed his eyes. It wasn't anything abstract that would make her do it, sometime and somewhere, or any need of reassurance or impulse to hurt, nothing like that. Simple sensuality, that's all. Simple sensuality six nights a week. And now he must stop thinking about Eleanor, and the best way of doing that would be to start talking again. He went back to the alcove and found Professor MacDonald asleep, his head on the table. Jake was clearing the glasses away.

"Nothing will get him up now," Jake said. "Every week or so he gets like this. I don't want to stick him in a cab and have his wife give him hell. Why didn't you talk to him?"

"I did."

"I guess you did, didn't you?"

The interne shook the old man gently.

"I told you nothing would get him up now," Jake said. "Just let him sleep it off."

He went back to the bar and the interne followed him. Mr. Angyal was still on his first Scotch-and-soda.

"Make mine a Tom Collins," said the interne.

"You sure?" Jake asked.

"Sure I'm sure."

Jake shrugged and began to mix the drink.

"Well, Doc," said Mr. Angyal, "how's the world treating you this fine morning?"

The Legs Go First

February, 1942

He came into Jake's not long after midnight and ordered a double Scotch with the air of a man who intends to get drunk in a hurry. Tentatively, he leaned on the high stool next to Daisy's. She finished her beer and prepared to look accessible.

"All right, Daisy," Jake said. "Skip it. Freddie here is Mr. Weil's boy."

"How do you do," she said. "I'm Mrs. Bryson's girl."

"Hi," Freddie said. He was no longer a boy, though he could have passed for nineteen and did, professionally. His curly hair and his smooth cheeks and the prep-school clothes made him look younger than he was.

"Skip it, Daisy, I said." Jake turned to Freddie. "How're you keeping?"

"Not so good."

"Daisy," said Jake, "would you believe it? Years ago, when this place was a speakeasy and I was nothing but a glorified dishwasher, they used to send me out to chase this kid off the sidewalk in front. His father lives down the block—217. This kid used to bother the customers by opening taxi doors for them. And now he's a top-notch fiddler, right up there with Heifetz."

"Not quite," Freddie said. "Not by a long shot. I wish you wouldn't introduce me to people that way, Jake. And just in case you haven't been told, my name is Sergei Korolenko."

"How do you mean, Sergei Korolenko? Since when?"

"Since my teacher changed it. I thought my father must have told you by now. Rosenthal changed my name to Korolenko. He said it would help me in the music business. There's a yarn goes with it, too. My parents had to leave Moscow the time of the revolution and I was born in Paris and that's how come I can't speak Russian."

"But you can't speak French either," Jake said.

"Neither can any of the old ladies in the Beaux Arts Musical Society of Bayfield, N. J. They're my sponsors."

"You on the radio now?"

"No," said Freddie. "They've been paying Rosenthal for my lessons at ten bucks a throw and they bought me my new fiddle. They're all ninety-five years old, and I play for them when they throw a party and sometimes I go to their homes in the afternoon and drink tea."

"Pretty soft," Jake said.

"You think so?"

"Yes," Jake said. "I think so."

"Well, it isn't. Will you give Miss Bryson something to drink?"

"What'll it be?" Jake turned to her.

"Make mine Scotch, too," Daisy said. "Beer chaser. What happened to your old fiddle, Mr. Korolenko?"

"That was no fiddle. What I had was a cigar box with guts on it.

But this new one is a Testore and it cost the witches of Bayfield fourteen hundred smackers."

Jake set out the Scotch and beer. "That's a hell of a way to talk about your benefactors," he said.

"Ninety-five years old, every one of them, except the president. *She* used to embroider wampum around the campfire with Pocahontas. Jake, do you like tea?"

"For fourteen hundred pieces of wampum, I'd drink milk," Jake said.

"But they're getting it back, Jake, taking it right out of my hide. They tricked me, the philanthropic bastards. They pulled a fast one on me so fast I said yes before I knew what I was doing. I'll never live it down, not if I get to live twice as long as Pocahontas's chum. Will you pour me another?"

"Double again?"

Freddie nodded. He drank too fast, and patted Daisy's hand. "My God," he said. "A woman under ninety-five. Doesn't seem possible."

Jake waited on a couple of attendants from the garage down the block and came back to learn about the fast one pulled by the Beaux Arts Musical Society of Bayfield.

"The trouble," Jake said, "with your type of individual is that you don't know when you're sitting pretty. How would you like to be squatting in a machine-gun nest with a sixty-ton tank charging up the meadow?"

"That's neither here nor there," said Freddie. "Certainly, it isn't here. Here I'm up against something else. Do you want to argue or do you want to listen to me?"

"I want to listen," Daisy said.

Freddie looked at her. "Excuse me," he said. "I'm afraid I've forgotten your full name."

"It's Daisy Bryson," said Jake, "if you'll pardon the expression." He noticed that the boy had got drunk on the two double Scotches and decided not to serve him another. He hoped his old customer, Mr. Weil, would not wander into the place just then.

"Well, listen," Freddie said, "both of you. The ladies of Bayfield figured they'd get some of their money back. They rented the Civic Auditorium for this coming Saturday and engaged one of the best orchestras in the country to go into it. And I'm to play solo with them."

"There's a break for you," Jake said.

"A break in the pig's eye. I'm nowhere near good enough to play solo with that orchestra, and the conductor knows it. The ladies of Bayfield forced me on him through his lousy manager. That conductor is going to go out of his way to cut me down to size."

"No, he won't," Jake said. "No real big shot would do a thing like that."

"This one might. I could see by the way he acted at rehearsal this morning. He knows I have no business playing solo with an orchestra of national standing. Don't you see, it's a reflection on him. He's going to break my nerve, that's what he'll do. The noise of my knees knocking together will drown out the brasses. I'm scared."

"No use being scared," Jake said. "You know you're good. You do the best you can and this long-haired wisenheimer won't be able to spoil anything."

"Don't be dumb, Jake. All he'd have to do is cue in a couple of chords too early or too late. Or ignore my phrasing and make the whole thing metronomic."

"Metronomic, eh?"

"At the very first allegro he could rush the tempo so as to throw me off altogether."

"To me," said Daisy, "he sounds like an ornery son of a bitch from way back. Has he really got long hair? I'd like to see a man with long hair."

"I get the idea," Jake said. "They're overmatching you—is that it? Like some manager rushing his boy too fast. Am I right?"

Freddie shook his head. "Don't be dumb, Jake. I got nobody managing me except the weird sisters of Bayfield. They're responsible for everything. You can't blame the conductor. Hell, he's got half a dozen men in his fiddle section better entitled to play solo. His concertmaster played before all the crowned heads of Europe ten years before I was born."

"Ought to be pretty well shot by now," Jake said. "The legs go first."

"I'm scared," Freddie said. One of his eyelids fluttered and he pressed his fist against it. "My face feels like somebody's sticking pins into it. I don't want to stand up in front of those guys and play the A-major. That's a big concerto."

"Why don't you try playing a little one first and work your way up gradual like?" Daisy asked.

Freddie kept his fist pressed against his left eye. "You're nice," he said. "What'd you say your name was?"

"Daisy."

"Ever hear this one?" He began to sing in a low voice:

I had a girl and her name was Daisy
And when she sang the cat went crazy.
One day she sang a song about
A man who turned himself inside out
And jumped into the river.
He was so very sleepy . . .

He mumbled the last two lines.

Jake said, "Why don't you go home, kid, take it easy?"

" 'There's many a man killed on the railroad,' " sang Freddie, " 'and cast in a lonely grave.' Daisy, don't you know any songs?"

"Sure," she said. She finished her chaser and cleared her throat. "Get this:

Cigarettes will spoil your life,
Ruin your health, and kill your baby,
Poor little innocent child . . .

Ain't that sad?"

"You're awful nice," said Freddie. "I don't want to drink any more of this stuff. Can I go home with you now?"

"Sure thing."

"No," Jake said.

"Well, I like that," said Daisy. "What's got into you, Jake?"

"He can't go, that's all. Why don't you go home to your own place, kid? You're a big shot. You don't want to be fooling around with Daisy."

"Yes, I do." He took his wallet out, still rubbing his eyes with one hand.

"Now, Jake," Daisy said. "What's good enough for his father is good enough for him. Don't you think so, Mr. Korolenko?"

"You're awful nice," Freddie said.

Jake looked at them and shrugged. He took Freddie's wallet and put everything it contained, except one five-dollar bill, in an envelope.

"You can come and pick this up tomorrow morning," he said.

"What the hell, Jake!" said Daisy. "You never knew me to roll one of your customers."

"Take him by the arm," Jake said. "I don't want him passing out in here."

Daisy Bryson took Freddie's arm and they went out. Freddie drew a deep breath of the cold air and shuddered. "All these old women want their money back," he said. "They wouldn't want me to be spending it on any young women. I got to play Saturday or they'll take my fiddle back. Jesus, I'm scared."

"Don't be scared, boy," Daisy said. "A hot cup of coffee will fix you up. There's nothing this long-haired son of a bitch can do will hurt you. A hot cup of coffee's what you want."

At George's

A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN

THE REVOLUTION

A Hot Time in the Old Town

May, 1940

George's candy and cigar store was having an unusually quiet evening. He passed the time making chocolate syrup behind the counter while Manny Hirsch, who ran numbers for him, sat on the pinball machine putting the slips in order.

"This is a bad spot for a store," George said. "How you gonna make a living squeezed in between a schoolyard and a Salvation Army flophouse?"

"You tell me," said Manny. "You been doing it twenty years. If I had your dough, I'd retire and take the next boat back to Greece."

Then the boys came in. They filed singly through the narrow door, McNeill, Gillis, Castellano, Bloom—seven or eight of them. The ones who couldn't find seats joined Manny around the pinball machine. Their average age was not over nineteen. Two of them were smoking cigars. McNeill carried a ragged old softball.

"All of a sudden I'm honored," George said. "Not a dime in the bunch of you."

"We got chased from the schoolyard. That lousy flatfoot Rizzuti," Bloom said.

"I'm ashamed of my nationality," said Castellano. "Dago bastard. Where the hell is a guy supposed to go on a Friday night?"

"Ever think of going to work?" Manny asked.

"Maybe we don't want to go to a CC camp," McNeill said. "That don't mean every two-by-four patrolman got a right to chase us off public property. If he done that down Houston Street, they'd tear his arm off and beat him to death with it. I don't see why we stand for it up here. My old man pays taxes."

"He ought to pay a nuisance tax on you," Manny said.

"Shut up, Hirsch. Where the hell is a guy supposed to hang out after nine? Do they want us to go to bed with our Teddy bears? They don't want you in the Park, they chase you off the corner, next thing you know they'll be telling you what size shoes to wear. Who's he think he is—Mussolini?"

"This is a good country," George said. "You boys don't know what you got here. Another year of war on the other side and you'll all be working."

Manny Hirsch pointed to one of the signs above the counter: "Don't Talk War." George had printed it himself about a month before when two customers got into a fist fight and broke the side of his showcase. Now he shrugged and returned to mixing the syrup. The boys looked set for a long stay.

"Why don't a couple of you take some chairs and sit out front on the sidewalk?" he said. "This supposed to be a place of business. I got to have room for some customers."

Castellano and two others took chairs and set them around the newsstand outside.

McNeill placed a nickel on the counter and squeezed the softball into one of his pockets. "I'm a customer," he said. "Give me a milk shake."

"That reminds me," said Manny. "I was talking about you to a guy from Jersey City runs a semi-pro club there. Said he'd give you a tryout. If you're going to play softball, why not pick up three bucks for the evening? This is his card."

"Thanks," McNeill said. "I think I'll look him up."

"What do you mean, you *think*?" George said. "Go ahead, maybe you'll gonna be champion, beat Joe DiMaggio, get your picture in the paper. I'll paste it in the window. Who can tell? This a wonderful country."

"Not with that bastard Rizzuti around, it ain't," McNeill said.

George placed the milk shake on the counter. "I don't know what's the matter with young people today," he said. "You got no ambition."

"I got an ambition," Bloom said. "I got an ambition to get the hell out of New York."

"Get out and do what?"

"Get out and get out. Nothing. Get out and get my teeth sunburned."

"Three dollars for playing softball," George said. "In Greece a man works two weeks for that. In Greece you buy a suit of clothes for three dollars."

"Why'n't you go back there?"

"You don't understand. I like it here. You wouldn't kick neither if you knew what was good for you. In Greece, Rizzuti could lock you up if you looked at him cockeyed. Go offer me six million for my citizenship papers. See if I take it."

"Go offer me five thousand for mine," Manny said. "Offer me three. Watch me sailing off to Greece and every other place. Jeez, imagine me in Madagascar with a country full of nudniks who don't know from a hole in the ground. Man, I'd get my three thousand back in six months just off pinball machines like this one. Sounds like a pipe dream, don't it? They laughed at Dutch Schultz."

Bloom said, "Who laughed at Dutch Schultz?"

"They all laughed."

"I'm still laughing," George said.

"Offer me fifteen hundred. Offer me a thousand. Man and boy, would I show them what matzoth balls are made of? Ask me, would I? Don't tell me I got no ambition. If I had your bank roll, I'd multiply it so fast we'd have an armored truck going all day. Why don't you loosen up, George? Why don't you loosen up and blow me to a Turkish bath tonight? Massage some of your fat off."

Manny had been working up to that for some time, and when he saw George go silently back to the chocolate syrup, he took his coat and left.

It wasn't the same without Manny. The boys on the sidewalk took to reading detective magazines off the rack and looking at the pictures in *Life*. The boys inside played a few listless rounds on the pinball machine. George made several attempts to get rid of them, even forced Bloom to sweep up. Then Rizzuti came by and knocked on the door. George opened it.

"Get these guys in off the sidewalk," Rizzuti said. "Salvation Army people complained about the noise."

"We got a right to sit here," Castellano said.

"Sure you got a right. All the same, you're getting the hell in. Listen, George, either you keep these lunks inside or send them home where they belong."

Rizzuti waited until the boys had carried their chairs in. He didn't know whether to disregard their mutterings or catch what they were saying and actually run a couple of them in for abusing an officer. He was morally certain that the group, or some part of it, was responsible for the increasing number of petty larcenies on his beat. The previous night, a whole case of milk had been lifted off a wagon.

"Rizzuti, I gonna give you a piece from my mind," George said. "These boys are citizens of the United States same as me and they got a right to sit out there as long as they want to. One of them Salvation Army drums makes more noise than the whole bunch together. Whose store front is it, anyway? Why don't you go catch Al Capone? He's loose again. Why don't you go catch Hitler? Just for that, I gonna keep open another half-hour, give these lunks a place to sit. They ain't no lunks. If I got the time, I go see McNeill play softball before I buy tickets again for your lousy firemen game."

"Keep talking," Rizzuti said. "Now I'll know where to look for the neighborhood fence. No chairs on the sidewalk, that's all I got to say." He went away.

"What's a neighborhood fence?" George asked.

"Look at him cross that gutter," McNeill said. "Like he owned it. Down in Houston Street they'd cut his heart out and send it to the Precinct in a tin can. Down in Red Hook they'd rip the brassiere off his sister and choke him to death with it. We sit here and take his guff."

"Leave his sister out of this," George said. "How you know? Maybe she's a nice girl. That don't mean I got to take his guff. You hear me give him a piece from my mind? Whose store front is it, anyway?"

"In Red Hook," said McNeill, "they'd break his teeth out, one by one, and hammer them into his skull."

The Revolution

April, 1941

George Kyrillis was seated behind the counter of his candy and cigar store, waiting for young McNeill to bring his supper from the delicatessen across Third Avenue. He listened with weary patience to Manny Hirsch.

"The days of the numbers dodge are numbered," said Manny. He paused impressively, a little overwhelmed by his own rhetoric. "All some young punk D.A. has to do is move in and get himself elected mayor by ruining the game for a year. Why don't you get wise and let me build a little steady poker clientele in the back room? All I ask is a table and some chairs."

"I'm covered on the numbers," George said. "Where I'm gonna get my protection on the card game?"

"All the protection you need is five bucks a week to the man on the beat and maybe ten a month to the sergeant. Me and McNeill could do the bouncing if it ever come to that, which it wouldn't."

"The hell it wouldn't. I seen these friendly little poker games before. The kind of guys would take a hand with you, I'd have to pay a full-time torpedo to keep them in line."

"They wouldn't want to get gay with me and McNeill both. He's young but he's big, and they all know I got connections. I wouldn't have nobody from out of town, and no gibs from Seventy-fifth Street either. I swear I should drop dead when I go out that door if you ain't kicking away a fortune of money."

"Forget it," said George.

He was hungry and fell to eating immediately as McNeill brought the food. He drank the thick pea soup out of the container. At one point during Manny's harangue he had felt tempted to tell him about the bank books but, as always, he suppressed the impulse. Nobody, not even his old mother in Greece, knew about those books. There were nine of them, representing thirty-eight hundred dollars in all, twenty years' savings skimmed off a seventeen-hour working day, seven days a week. What did a big-mouth like Hirsch know about fortunes of money?

Manny glanced at his watch, turned on the radio and listened to it just long enough to get some racing results.

"How they running?" McNeill asked.

"A photo finish," said Manny, "but my horse didn't photograph so good. Every time I play a filly she gives me the business. Which reminds me, your sister was in asking for you. She out of convent school for fair?"

"And a good thing too. I'm eating regular meals again for the first time since my mother died."

"Your old man shouldn't keep a girl like that in the house. With her looks she could be selling cigarettes in the Diamond Horseshoe."

"She's only fifteen."

"With the right kind of management," said Manny, "a girl like that could get the hat check concession in a spot I know down on Fifty-fourth Street. That spot is always full of picture people. Another year or two and she'd be in line for a screen test."

"I've heard about them screen tests," McNeill said. "Dottie Gillis took one and now she's on the night shift at Madame Helga's Danish Massage Parlor. My old man got a Smith and Wesson all loaded and ready for the kind of picture people you know."

The Revolution

George drank the last of his pea soup. He wondered how the tearing down of the Second Avenue "L" would affect trade.

Mr. Goldfarb, the matrimonial consultant, came in. He was a round man, not quite five feet tall, and he wore a derby. He reached into the fifteen cent box and grasped a handful of cigars.

"Greetings and salutations," he said. "What do you know?"

"Enough not to ask a question like that," McNeill replied.

Mr. Goldfarb said what he always said when temporarily at a loss for an answer. "I make a living."

"A fat one too," said Manny Hirsch. "Comes the revolution, we'll all be smoking fifteen cent cigars."

"What do you fellows know about revolutions?" Mr. Goldfarb asked, thoughtfully. He lit one of the cigars. "I lived through a big one in 1905 and all I ever got out of it was a Persian rug. Paid ten gold rubles to buy it off a mouzhik in Kharkov, and that day they burned a castle at the other end of town, so I wasn't gonna ask where he got it. My worst enemy should have the trouble I had hiding that thing once they stopped the revolution. A value this rug had, believe me. Twice in this country I could have sold it for a thousand dollars but my wife likes beautiful things in the house."

"How come she lets you in?" McNeill asked.

George frowned. "Don't mind him, Mr. Goldfarb."

"I ignore him. A jitterbug."

"Comes the revolution," said Manny, "Goldfarb's going to fix everybody with a wife that likes beautiful things in the house."

"Get yourself a serious job, my boy, and you can write your own ticket as far as wives is concerned. A college-educated girl I could get for you."

"A little knocked up, that's all," McNeill said.

"I ignore you, jitterbug. But you, Manny, at your age you ought to be thinking about the future. When I was thirty I had four children, and today they all got their place in the world, professional people. What are you waiting for?"

"I'll tell you what. A lightweight who can box like Gans, take it like Bat Nelson and dish it out like Jimmy McLarnin. Get me a boy like that and I'll make him the best manager ever lived."

"A good wife," Mr. Goldfarb said, "is the jewel of a man's life. You don't worry about strangers, so why should they worry about you? With a wife, it's different. Twenty-four hours a day you got somebody looking out for your interests. Believe me, I would have sold that rug thirty years ago for half of what it's worth. My wife knew better. Already she knew I had the stuff to make good. Today when I step into my parlor I'm walking on the rug of a prince."

"If I had a fighter like that," said Manny, "I'd nurse him like he was quintuplets. I'd build him in the Coliseum, season him out on the Coast, and once he was ready, no pin-money mob could ever get as much as a smell of his purse. That's who I'm saving my love for."

"A mistake. Get a serious job, my boy, and I'll get you a nice, refined girl with an established hat shop yet on Prospect Avenue. Start your life before it's too late. You ain't no jitterbug no more."

Manny was nettled. "Listen, Goldfarb. I'll be batting out twins when I'm sixty and I'll live to piss on the grave of your nice refined college girl too. Comes the revolution, I'm going to marry Ginger Rogers and no percentage for you, either."

Mr. Goldfarb shrugged, smiling. He handed Manny one of the fifteen cent cigars, and left. "Good-by, my friend," he said to George. "Good luck to you and yours."

George was finishing his meal. "You boys don't want to talk that way to Mr. Goldfarb. Customers don't like that kind of language."

"What do you want me to do, marry one of his bags? McNeill's kid sister here is worth more than all the biddies that phoney ever had in his book."

"Never mind about Gloria," McNeill said. "She's only fifteen."

"Looks older."

"Fifteen is all."

"They get married at ten in India."

"Well, this ain't India. You spread the word around to your pals. Gloria's fifteen and this ain't India."

"Comes the revolution," said Manny, "we're moving in on that country."

How they talk, George thought, how foolish. Back in Greece the young went to work and they kept quiet when the old people talked. Still, the young had it better then. They didn't know so much, but they surely had it better.

"Some day," said George, "you fellows going to bust my pinball machine, leaning on it like that."

En Route

BILLY THE BASTARD

OUT WHERE THE WEST BEGINS

THE GIRL WHO HAD TO GET MARRIED

Billy the Bastard

January, 1941

I met Billy the Bastard in the hobo jungle on the west side of the railroad yards in Council Bluffs, Iowa. He was the only road kid anywhere near my age in that jungle. The others were as crummy-looking a crew of old lammisters as I had seen in two months on the bum. They were too mean even to get up a pot of mulligan after a whole afternoon of waiting for the westbound manifest. And I could see that a few of them had makings.

Toward evening a small group of wolves started talking it up around a fire, and it sounded to me as if I might have to do some battling for my honor. Billy had also been watching them carefully. He gave me a quick glance and we both began walking. From then on we hung together for about three months, mostly along the trunk line of the Union Pacific.

Billy was probably a year younger than I and a good deal smaller, so at first I was not too eager to buddy up with him, thinking I'd have to do most of the dirty work. He looked sloppy, too. The old army shirt he wore was many sizes too large, and his blue denim pants were frayed and held up by a belt without a buckle. The way things were, and for all I know still are, on the Union Pacific, it's just possible that he chose to look unappetizing as a measure of self-defense, but I think he rather relished looking tough. He made a point of referring to himself as Billy the Bastard. Before he hit the road he had belonged to a Kingston, Pa., gang named the Bastard Kings of Kingston.

According to Billy, the law got to the Bastard Kings only after they had pulled over a hundred burglaries. When they finally put the bee on Billy, he was sent off to the county farm for a six-month stretch, which he reduced to three weeks by escaping. The anxieties I had about his youth and inexperience were dispelled in very short order. He attended to his own wants and frequently to mine as well.

Billy had one breadwinner that could net him as high as two dollars in any fair-sized town. Pen in hand, he would stand forlornly around the post office, and when a likely customer came within hearing distance he'd say, "Boy, if I had a stamp, I'd write my mother." In a few hours he would have not only enough stamps to mail out the entire edition of a small quarterly of the arts but contributions toward the *plat du jour* of some local ulcer farm.

The time he pulled this in Cheyenne he almost ended up with his jaw in a sling. I was standing beside him in the post office when a big man came over and said, "I thought I gave you enough in Greeley to keep your mother posted for a month."

"You never gave me nothing," Billy said.

"Sure I did. Greeley—don't you remember? No more than a couple of weeks back."

"Mister, I write my mother twice a day."

"A fresh guy, too," the big man said. "I got a mind to take it out of your hide."

"You got nothing, no mind or nothing," said Billy.

We made a run for it, and the big fellow chased us about a block before he gave up.

"No nickel-nursing yokel is going to shove me around," Billy said. "That's the trouble with them kind of people. They give you two bits and think they own you for life."

The same week, near a little division point outside of Butte, a rancher caught us fishing for bullheads on his property. He was mounted and could not follow as we ran through the woods, but sent a load of birdshot after us just to make it stick. Later, at the railroad yards, Billy found a grain of shot imbedded in one of his shoes. I had a time of it to prevent him from going back and setting fire to the fellow's barn. In the heat of discussion I failed to notice that he saved the grain, but long afterward he found an odd use for it. Every time he came up against one of my rare scruples he would push that pellet under my nose and say, "Don't be a god-damn sucker all your life. It's us or them." "Them" was anybody who had something we needed, while "sucker" was his fiercest form of invective.

The one time I entertained some fears of Billy's going soft was in an Idaho jerktown named Franklin. We had been meaning to hold down a hot-shot freight clear through to the Oregon line but we got bounced at this watering stop by one of the shacks. We were pretty well heeled, having sold a stolen tire for two dollars the day before, but neither of us cottoned to the idea of spending a whole Saturday in that gopher hole. There were no other drags pulling up there until midnight.

We killed an hour splashing around in the water tank and another lying on our bellies in the sun. I had just about decided to snag any old rattler on the run when a brass band started playing somewhere in town.

"Maybe this trading post is bigger than we think," said Billy.

It turned out to be big enough to have a high school with an athletic field and a band. They were about to play a football game with a visiting team from Glenns Ferry. We went to the field, and there must have been five hundred people in the stands. Billy and I took seats just above the local cheering section. They yelled blue murder every time Franklin made a two-yard gain, and that was often. The visitors had one fine back but no line at all. Franklin was slicing off tackle at will. By the last quarter I had lost interest, but Billy was still spellbound. The Franklin cheerleader seemed to exercise some peculiar enchantment over him.

"Lookit," said Billy, "excepting that red letter 'F,' everything he got is white—pants, sweater, shoes, socks, loudspeaker, and everything. There ain't a speck of dirt on the whole guy, and him jumping around like an acrobat in a circus."

"You don't get dirty from grass."

"I do, and you would, but this guy don't. Lookit how white he is. His old lady must have a laundry bill running into boxcar numbers. That kind don't do their own washing. He don't have to worry about his chuck and flop. His old man will be shelling out for him another five years or more."

"So what? I worked in a bowling place back in New York where they had two college guys setting them up in the alleys alongside of me. Guys like that come dime a dozen."

"Not this guy," said Billy. "When he sets them up, it'll be drinks of champeen in Chicago or somewhere. Whitey's no sucker."

"You can have him," I said. "I never yet seen a cheerleader worth a damn. We had four of them in school."

I argued some more with him, off and on, but nothing could shake his admiration for Whitey. After the game we even followed the boy to a drugstore, where Billy blew thirty cents of our hard-earned money on ice-cream sodas.

"A guy like that probably got a car of his own," Billy said.

Whitey's team had won by a large score and he seemed quite steamed up about it. He and a group of fellow-students sang their school song twice, and the soda clerk joined in on the chorus. All in all, it was a big day for Coca-Cola.

On his way out, Whitey stopped by our table and said, "You fellows from out of town, aren't you? Staying overnight?"

"What's it to you?" was what I expected Billy to say. What he said was "Maybe."

"The school's having a marshmallow toast on the picnic grounds at eight this evening," said Whitey. "It's for the benefit of our hospital fund. It's only twenty-five cents a ticket. There'll be dancing and lots of nice girls and all the marshmallows you can eat. How about it, fellows?"

"We'll take a couple," Billy said, without so much as looking at me.

"You bet," said Whitey.

We spoke no more of Franklin High's impeccable cheerleader. If I had any ideas about the price and value of marshmallows, I kept them to myself for fear of seeming tight about money, and if Billy had something up his sleeve, there it stayed. At eight-thirty we went to the picnic grounds, a mile out of town.

The dancing wasn't much. They had a victrola with a loudspeaker attachment, but half the time it didn't work. The marshmallows were there all right, and so was Whitey. He took up where he had left off in the afternoon—led the songs, the square-dancing, and, of course, the cheers. They had one that went:

Red and white,
Red and white,
Franklin, Franklin
Fight, fight, fight!

Listening to that, Billy looked like Joan of Arc hearing the voices. Whitey too was inspired, and in order to perform better he took off his snow-white sweater. The shirt under it was white.

"How much longer we going to stick around here?" I asked.

"I got an idea," Billy said. "You go back to the water tank and I'll meet you there in an hour. Don't ask no questions."

It was a long walk back to the yards and I was pretty sore by the time I got there. If I had not been so curious about Billy's idea, I might have hopped a slow freight that went by. Billy came running in less than an hour and he had something stuffed under his belt. He took it out in the clear moonlight: Whitey's sweater.

"I wanted it," he said.

He didn't put it on until we were down in a reefer on the long drag of empties which pulled up at midnight.

"How's it look?"

"Pretty good," I said. As a matter of fact, it was dark in there.

"I think I'll keep this 'F' on."

Billy did not get to see himself wearing the sweater until we came into Boise, where they had mirrors.

"Christ, it don't look near so snappy on me," he said.

"It looks all right," I said.

"No, it don't. Too big and floppy. It's got dirty, even."

"Coal dust."

We went into a hash house and blew in the rest of our money on steaks, but the food didn't seem to make him much happier.

"All the same," he said, "that guy was no sucker. He had a lot on the ball."

"Dime a dozen," I said.

The further West we went, the dirtier Billy's sweater got. Going into Salem, we had to ride the rods and he got a smear of oil on it, stretching from shoulder to shoulder. It was in Salem that I lost him. We had agreed to meet in back of the roundhouse, but he never showed up.

Out Where the West Begins

April, 1941

We were riding between two boxcars when the rain started. The first fine drizzle was warm, but then a downpour came cold and steady. There were no lights to be seen at either side of the train. It was only because of the curves we took that I supposed we must be coming into hill country. I asked Rusty if he thought that meant we'd be stopping to take water, but a peal of thunder drowned out my voice and I was too miserable to speak up again. I could smell the soaked felt of his hat, which he pressed against the boxcar ahead to save himself from the wind. By the time we pulled up at a siding, the rain had made its way clear through the leather of my tobacco pouch. I felt the clammy pulp in my pocket as we both jumped off and started pounding through the mud of the yards.

The nearest light was about two hundred yards off and came from an all-night lunchwagon. We found the counterman alone, except for a single customer at the end of the counter, a large man in high laced boots. It was warm in there and we stripped to our shirts.

"Two cups of coffee, quick," said Rusty.

The counterman made no move. "You fellows got any money?" he asked.

Rusty looked at me. "Show him."

I took our quarter out and placed it on an empty plate. We had spent the rest of our money on two square meals back in Minnesota. The counterman bounced the coin to see if it was any good. Then he served us. My coffee tasted all right, but Rusty twisted his face.

"Sheep-dip," he said. "You don't want no fake money, but when it comes to dishing out coffee you ain't so particular."

Instead of answering him, the counterman looked at his first customer who had been studying us since we came in.

"You men just get off that train?" the customer asked. He sounded at least semiofficial.

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm the marshal here." He drew his mackinaw slightly to one side.

"Anybody can sport a badge," said Rusty.

"I'm the marshal here, all right," the man said. He pulled a gun out of his holster and put it on the stool in front of him. It was a long, old-fashioned Colt peacemaker. "Did you men just get off that train?"

"No, we just walked here on the highway, trying to get a lift," I said.

"What's the last town you passed through?"

"I forgot."

"My buddy's a great kidder," said Rusty. "Don't let him put one over on you. Our plane had engine trouble and we bailed out. You'll find the parachutes on a beet field about five miles up that way. You can't miss them. Mine has a strawberry mark below its left shoulder."

"I see," the marshal said. "A couple of wise guys."

"You ain't wrong."

"No, I ain't. Not often. You fellows better finish that coffee. You're getting run in for vagrancy."

"Not in this state," said Rusty. "Not if we can show we got five dollars apiece."

"Who would you ever get ten dollars off'n?"

"Not chiseling it off'n road stiffs like some people in these crotch counties around here. That's a cinch."

"Put it up."

Rusty opened his shirt, pulled off a cloth belt, and produced a ten-dollar bill, handling it gingerly because it was damp. I never knew he had it.

"It ain't fake, either, like them two scuttles of muck your buddy handed us. Now let's have two more. They're warm, anyway."

The counterman pushed two more cups of coffee at us. Rusty took them over to one of the booths and sat down with his back to the marshal. I followed him. The marshal's eyes shifted from Rusty to me, and it was I who finally had to look away. He continued to sit there with the Colt in front of him.

In an undertone, I said to Rusty, "What do you want to sass him for? Even with your ten dollars, he could run us in for trespassing on railroad property."

"How could he prove which direction we came from? We might just as well have dropped off a truck on the highway. Listen to me while I tell you something. All these guys want to do is make an arrest. Every arrest they make, they get three bucks and the sheriff gets a dollar a day for our keep. Whether there's a conviction or not, the marshal and the sheriff come out ahead. If he wants to make a couple of arrests and put us up for the night, that's O.K. with me. It wouldn't be the first time I done it, and we could use a dry flop. Just let me do the talking and you stick to your story about us coming in off the highway."

"I still don't see why you had to sass him."

"I don't feel good, that's why. Look at him, setting there all dry and full of beans. Him and his six-shooter. Who the hell does he think he is—Tom Mix?"

The marshal could not have heard us, but he put the gun away all the same, and for a moment I thought he smiled.

"Ain't he the hot sketch, though?" said Rusty. "You'd think we were John Dillinger or somebody. Him and that lousy hasher wanting to see our money. Bet that's the first ten-dollar bill they seen in this burg since '29. What do you say we buy the place and bounce old Tom out of here?"

"Gentle down," I said. "He's coming over."

Rusty sipped his coffee. He did not look up until the marshal had seated himself on the stool opposite our booth.

"If you boys are looking for a place to sleep," the marshal said, "there's a couple of clean beds in our town jail and you'll get your breakfast in the morning." His voice was kind, almost wheedling. "Nearest hotel is twelve miles from here."

"What charge would you book us on?" Rusty asked.

"No particular charge. Leave it to me."

"No trial?"

"No trial."

"No funny stuff?" said Rusty. "I know the ropes, Mister."

"Say, what's the matter with you, son? You're out West now. There's no funny stuff here. Tomorrow morning, eight o'clock, you'll be on your way and no questions asked."

Rusty turned to me. "What do you say?"

"Seeing there's no hotel in town."

The marshal had his car outside, a big old Dodge. He had some trouble starting off in the mud.

"We get it here about this time of year," he said. "Been raining pitchforks and nigger babies all day."

The jail was not more than half a mile in toward town. It was really a private home. A middle-aged woman opened the front door.

"Where's Lee?" the marshal asked.

"He's shipping that crazy soldier back to the fort."

"I thought he wasn't going to drive in till tomorrow."

"He changed his mind," the woman said.

"Well, these boys are spending the night. Let's have the keys."

We went through the front parlor, the kitchen, and a passage that led to what had at one time been a garage. It was now one large cell.

The sheriff's wife followed us and switched the light on. The windows were barred. The floor had been swept clean and the cots, too, looked decent. The night before, we had slept less than three hours on a few gunnysacks in the roundhouse at Wannaska.

The marshal locked us in. As an afterthought, he passed some worn copies of *Liberty* through the bars.

"I'll be around in the morning and help you escape," he said, smiling.

"Don't lose the key," I said.

After they left, Rusty threw himself on one of the cots and laughed. Then he bent over, lifted the blanket, and examined the seams in his mattress.

"No little fellers far as I can see," he said. "Now, if they only had a checkerboard. Let's yell for the old bag and ask if she's got one."

"Not me. I want to sleep."

I did sleep, too. It was the best night's sleep I'd had in a long time. By morning my clothes were all dry. Rusty had dressed before me. He pointed to the blue sky and swore we'd make five hundred miles that day. We were headed for Puget Sound, where a cousin of his ran a filling station. The idea was, the cousin might take on one or both of us for chuck and flop money anyway.

The marshal came early. He led us out through the kitchen, where the sheriff's wife was busy over the stove.

"When do we eat?" said Rusty. "I like mine scrambled."

"Not here," the marshal said. "You come with me."

We got into the Dodge again, and he took us through the small town. He was driving the other way from the railroad yards. I didn't mind much because it might have been hours before another train pulled up there, and we could probably get to the next division point faster by thumbing a ride. I hoped he would not drive us too far out. I was hungry.

He stopped on the state highway at the foot of a hill.

"You boys go along now," he said. "I wouldn't want to see you around town."

"What about our breakfast?" I said.

"Get along."

He had the Colt and we got out of the car fast.

"You stink," I said.

"Your mother stinks too," said Rusty, "and your grandmother and your whole god-damned family."

The marshal smiled and made a U turn back toward town. We started to walk up the hill to catch the west-bound traffic. Cars don't like to stop before a grade.

"That's the first money we earned in a month," I said. "Two bucks for the sheriff and six for that baboon."

"No funny stuff here," said Rusty, mimicking the marshal. "You're out West now, boys. Why, the cheap, ornery bastard."

"Well, the beds were clean."

"Listen to me while I tell you something. I know faces. That marshal wasn't a bastard to begin with. It all started the minute they pinned a badge on him. The minute he went into politics. Never fails. They're all fakes, every damn one of them. The biggest fake of all time was a politician—P. T. Barnum."

"Was he?"

"Served a term in the Connecticut legislature. My grandfather used to shoe his horses. Biggest fake ever lived."

We reached the top of the hill and started flagging them. Several cars passed before Rusty spoke again.

"About them ten dollars I held out on you. I don't want you thinking things. Come Christmas, I want to send it to my kid."

"It's all right."

"You know how it is."

"Sure."

"I guess you didn't know I had a kid."

"Didn't even know you were married."

"I ain't. It's a long story. Ask me sometime in the dark, when the lights are out."

That was as much as I ever learned about Rusty's kid. We got a fine long lift in a Nash driven by a minister who talked a blue streak halfway across North Dakota.

The Girl Who Had to Get Married

January, 1939

January was an idiotic time of the year to leave California, but I had to get to Denver. I felt it was up to me to keep Marjorie from getting married. Yet all the way from Stockton I knew she was going to get married in spite of anything I might say, short of proposing. And if I did propose, one or the other of us would have to borrow the two dollars or whatever licenses cost in Colorado. I wished I had a car or a motorcycle or any means of locomotion other than those damned Western Pacific freight drags. January was no time of the year to do a thousand-odd miles by freight.

As it turned out, I got pretty good breaks as far as Grand Junction. There the temperature dipped well below zero. I hung around the local Salvation Army and the waiting room for several hours before an old bindle stiff came and said a drag full of empties was making up to pull out before dark. He claimed the brakie said there would not be another until the following noon. I made the bindle stiff swear he had seen the empties with his own eyes. All I would have needed that night was a ride on the rods.

The old man seemed hurt by my incredulity. All these road-crazy old stiffs are proud as hell of the way they have with brakies. He accompanied me to the west side of the yards just to prove he'd been right. Around the west bend we found two more fellows waiting, a cowboy with an extra pair of boots hanging from his shoulder, and a well-dressed young man who smoked ready-made cigarettes. I helped them make a fire. With sundown it got even colder, and none of us felt like talking.

Pretty soon Beau Brummell called our attention to the sing in the rails. Sure enough, the drag came around the bend, slow and easy to hop. We let about a dozen cars go past before an open empty rolled up. Brummell jumped in first, then the cowboy and I together, and we had some difficulty pulling the old bindle stiff after us. He could have made one of the other empties easy, but I guess he wanted company. Once he was in, though, he unrolled his bindle and lay down. The cowboy placed his extra boots in a corner and began walking back and forth to keep warm.

At night we ran into the Grand Mesa. Some of the cliffs seemed no more than fifty yards from the track and loomed white in the moonlight. A coyote began running alongside the drag and kept up with us for a good three miles. The mesquite got thicker as we went further up the grade. The moon seemed to get larger, too, and all the stars ever seen in Colorado were out. Cold as it was, we kept the door open. The wind could not hit our half of the car anyway. The three of us walked up and down in the cold; the old trambo lay wrapped in his blankets.

The moisture on my lips froze and my fingers were numb even after I held them in my mouth, one by one. I was sorry I ever left California, and I hated sweet Marjorie. I had to have fire. I would have burned all the pages of a Gutenberg Bible. It must have been thirty below. It was so cold it took me three hours to remember that the entire car was lined with the stiff paper used when grain is shipped. I tore off a few strips and lighted them. As soon as there was a fire, all three of us began ripping paper off the walls and burning it and coughing in the smoke. The bindle stiff slept quietly.

Smoke and all, it was a beautiful fire. The cowboy brought his boots over and almost smiled.

Beau Brummell examined the boots and then, pointing at his own new shoes, he said, "Where do you think I got these?"

"Where?"

"At the Utah University chapter of Beta Theta Pi," he said. "It's a dodge I work. Walk into a frat house and pass myself off as a brother from some other state and say I'm in line for a job with a firm in town and I need a decent suit of clothes or a pair of shoes to apply in. Mostly, they find something for you. Then you beat it. Course you got to know passwords, handshakes, and all that."

"My father used to be in the Masons," I said. "They had a handshake."

"There's a racket that's got this one beat hollow, if you work it good," Brummell said. "Look up the obituary column in the local paper and if a guy about your own age has just hopped the twig, find out a few things about him and go round to his folks and make out you were a friend of his, down on your luck. Generally you end up with most of his clothes and a few dollars maybe."

"That's a hell of a racket," the cowboy said.

"All the good rackets are shot," said Brummell. "In the old days you could send circulars to a sucker list and offer them a beautiful engraving of George Washington for a quarter in coins, and then mail them two-cent stamps in exchange. The law got on to that one."

We looked in the fire to see what made it burn so bright. Some of the floor boards had caught, and we got scared and stamped the fire out. The smoke had been making our eyes smart anyway. After that we suffered not only from the cold but the memory of the warmth and the thought of what the crew would have done to us if the car had caught fire. The three of us went back to stalking up and down. I could see two ends of cigarettes in the dark.

After mesa country came the hills and snow. I wondered if I would give a year of my life to be riding the plush then, and finally I concluded I would not. There was too much you could do in a year. By the time we reached the Divide I thought my brains had frozen.

When we neared the Big Hump, the engineer started going crazy with signals. We pulled up in the yards to pick up an extra locomotive. Some of these fruit drags needed as many as three on a climb. We heard the sound of steam and went to the door with only one thing in mind—get warmed up by the engine and the hell with the crew. They couldn't refuse a rattlesnake on a night like that. I bent down to shake the sleeping old man, and the minute I touched him I was pretty sure he was dead. I shook him over and over. I dragged him where the light hit his face and he was not breathing visibly. The cowboy had already jumped off and he came back to see what was up. Beau Brummell was still in the car. He stood there, watching me.

"There's something wrong with him," I said. "Maybe he's dead. Help me carry him to the sandhouse."

"He's dead all right," Brummell said. "I wouldn't touch him with a walking stick. How the hell do I know what he died of?"

"You wouldn't touch him?" the cowboy asked.

"No."

The cowboy helped me wrap the old man and carry him to the sandhouse. We found an Italian there, shoveling hot sand high around the stove. He stripped the old man's chest bare and examined him.

"Froze dead," he said. "I see plenty of them in the Italian army."

"You got a doctor around here?"

"No, but he don't need no doctor. He need a priest to bury him in the ground."

I could hear the engines getting active. "We have to leave him here," I said. "Our drag is pulling out."

"You don't know nothing about him?"

"We picked him up in Grand Junction, that's all we know."

"All right," the Italian said. "It is sad. Maybe he got a daughter someplace. You leave him here. I take care."

"Thanks," I said.

We walked back toward our empty.

"What do they heat that sand for?" the cowboy asked.

"They use it on the rails to keep the wheels from sliding."

"We couldn't have done that old boy any good by staying with him."

"No."

"I'm in a hurry. I got to be in Cheyenne by tomorrow."

"I got to be in Denver."

"Too bad about the old boy."

"It's lousy," I said.

The train was beginning to move when we reached our empty. Brummell had got in before us. "Dead?" he asked.

"Yes."

"So you wouldn't touch him?" the cowboy said.

"Not with a walking stick. How do I know what he died of?"

"You're no good."

Both engines gave the highball and we jerked ahead. The door slammed shut. None of us took the trouble to open it. The train started to climb, and we began walking up and down again in the darkness. The cold might have relented some. I don't know. It was at least half an hour before one of us spoke.

"Say, friend," the cowboy said to Brummell, "will you open the door?"

Brummell slid the door open. As he stood there, the cowboy came up behind him and pushed him off the train. If the fellow screamed, I didn't hear him.

"What'd you do that for?" I said. "The guy might have got killed. Even if he landed okay, it's a fifteen-mile walk back to the yards."

"That'll give him a chance to use them new shoes," the cowboy said. "I don't give a hoot in hell. I got no use for a guy like that. This ought to teach him a lesson. Next time, he'll show more kindness to his fellow-man."

"I don't think so."

"Well, I'm picky about my bunkies." He closed the door again because a wind had started up from the north.

We stuck together as far as the Denver yards. There we parted, and I went to a phone booth to call my sister. She told me that Marjorie had already got married and that the bridegroom was the Swede who owned the garage on the corner of Morgan and Elm.

Waiting

ALL THEY DO IS TALK

THE DAY BEFORE

VACANCY IN WESTCHESTER

I HOPE YOU'LL UNDERSTAND

THE VOLCANO

All They Do Is Talk

July, 1940

Late in the afternoon Henry went downstairs and sat on a sofa in the lobby. It was a decent, second-rate hotel just east of Lexington Avenue, good enough for its news counter to carry some best-sellers and a small rack of Oxford Pocket Classics. In front of the counter, a girl in a light print dress was studying the headlines. She took a long look at her wristwatch with an air of demonstrating her annoyance at being kept waiting. Then, as the clerk turned his back to answer the phone, she reached out and, with a marvelously deft motion, slipped one of the Oxford books into her bag. An open pack of cigarettes appeared in her hand so quickly and casually that the whole thing looked like a parlor stunt. She searched in her bag for a match and, not finding one, walked across the lobby and sat down at the other end of Henry's sofa.

"Could I have a light?" she said.

A little bewildered, he broke the first match. When her cigarette was lighted she took a couple of long drags before thanking him.

"Waiting for someone?" she asked.

"No."

"I was, but it doesn't look like he's going to show up. Like to have a drink with me?" She smiled.

"I'd be glad to. Only you must have it with me."

She was not a very good-looking girl, but well enough built, tall They stood up and he turned to go into the grill.

"Not here," she said. "I know a better place."

They went out through the revolving door. She took his arm and smiled again.

"There's a bar on the corner where they got pretty good service, but we can go straight to my place if you like."

Up to that point he had had no very clear idea what she was about. Perhaps that was because he had grown up in New York, where there is almost no open soliciting. He was a little disappointed. The Oxford Classics aspect of it had no doubt led him to anticipate something else —a great-niece of President McKinley, say, determined to make good on the stage and struggling along in New York, spurned by her family.

"Let's go to the bar with the good service," he said.

It was a large, clean place on the Third Avenue corner, and they took an alcove. The waiter knew her. She ordered a double Scotch.

"What's the matter with me?" she asked. "Don't you think I'm nice?"

"Yes, I do. I'd just rather talk now."

"I never seen so many guys who'd just rather talk. Either there's something the matter with me or it's them."

"It's them."

"Must be this war or something. You'd think all this talk about us going in would make them say what the hell, I might as well get a good time while the getting's good. Instead, they just sit around talking or making you talk."

"You needn't talk," he said. "Have a sandwich with me?"

"I'll have another Scotch, if you don't mind," she said. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It's only that you'd think there was nothing else to talk about except tanks and *Blitzkriegs* and how I happened to get into this line and how I like it."

"What do you tell them?"

"You mean you want to know too, don't you?"

"No, I mean what do you tell them?"

"About how I like it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, different things. Mostly I say I'd like it fine if they were all like the guy who asked the question. But sometimes I tell them other things. This morning I said to a fellow, 'Supposing you go into a subway car and take a good look at the faces of all the guys across the aisle and then you make out you're me—that's what it's like.' So he starts talking about the war. You'd think Hitler was riding down Broadway in the Mayor's car already."

The waiter brought his sandwich and her drink.

"Well, it's no skin off mine," she said. "I don't care if they give him the key to the city."

"Who?"

"Hitler. Maybe a war is just what the men in this country need to wake them up. Talk, talk is all they do."

"I hadn't meant to insist on talking," he said. "I just couldn't go off with you on account of an oath I took to remain pure until the right girl should come along, a little homebody with a yearly income of forty thousand dollars."

"Oh, you're the kidding type," she said.

He felt silly sitting there, because he really did want to ask her questions and would have if she hadn't told him how she felt about people who just talk. He also felt a little guilty about taking up her time. The cut she was getting off the drinks could not have amounted to much, particularly since, after the third round, they got one on the house. The way she tucked in Scotch was so infectious that he tried to match it, and his whole impression of her became somewhat blurred. At any rate, she was not a Maugham prostitute who hated men or a Dostoevski one who loved humanity or a Proust one who earned her coffee-and by whipping chained dukes in damp cellars or an Albert Payson Terhune one given to breeding collies.

"Don't get me wrong about this war business," she said after an interval of tablecloth sketching. "I don't want to see it spread to this country any more than you do. I got a kid brother liable to the draft. All I mean is, something's got to be done to stir things up. The town's shot to hell with all this talk and nothing else but. Don't you ever get sick of listening to people talk?"

"Sure."

"It isn't just men, either. Women, too. I was on the 'L' with one of them yesterday. She had a little kid with her and this kid kept yowling and trying to climb out of the window. So the woman says, 'Mabel, if you keep quiet and behave until we get home, I'll let you eat the cheese out of the mousetrap like you wanted to.' Don't you think that's a dumb thing to say?"

"Absolutely," Henry said. "Never make children promises you don't intend to keep."

"You know, a funny thing, I believe people would be better off if they just shut up ninety-nine times out of a hundred. It's different when you have a drink or two. I bet a woman dumb enough to say that to a kid is dumb enough to do it. I could bring up a kid better than that, God forbid."

"So could I."

"If I had a kid, I'd tell her all about me before somebody else did. I'd tell her the same thing I told the fellow this morning about the faces of the guys in the subway, so she'd know what I was up against. I wouldn't mind so much if it wasn't for all this talk, talk."

The waiter had drifted around again, but Henry was not going to buy any more drinks. When she sensed that, she took out her makeup kit and began to apply rouge. The Oxford book slid partly out of her bag, lying open on the table. It was "Selected French Short Stories." He glanced at the table of contents and it listed Stendhal, Balzac, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. He got ready to leave. She replaced the book in her bag.

"I haven't read this yet," she said, "but it ought to be pretty snappy. French, you know." She winked.

The Day Before

September, 1942

The day before he went into the Army, Martin thought he'd take a last look at the town. The intention was possibly not quite so definite. Maybe it was just that he found himself on top of a Fifth Avenue bus, going north, and he had no more affairs to wind up. In truth, he had wound up his affairs on the first day of his allotted ten, and after that it became a matter of keeping busy.

As his bus passed the Empire State, he looked up into the brilliant sunshine and thought how odd that he had never, after twenty years in New York, seen the view from the top of any of its tallest buildings. He had never once been to the opera or the circus or a Horse Show or the Hayden Planetarium. He marveled to think that he never so much as had the curiosity to take a look inside of Grant's Tomb. Martin was accustomed to thinking of himself as having led an active and observant life. He decided to stay on the bus until it came to the Tomb.

The usual noon traffic jammed up in front of the Public Library. The building looked dingier and less imposing than in former years. At the age of thirteen, Martin had experienced a month of sustained ecstasy in there. Someone had told him that the story of *The Three Musketeers* was carried on in a series of other books, but his branch library did not have them and he was instructed to try the Main Building. He had circled the place half a dozen times before daring to go in, but after he did, he spent every afternoon there for a month. He read those books over and over—*Louise de la Vallière, Ten Years Later*—and when D'Artagnan died at last, Martin could not eat until the next day at breakfast.

Ten Years Later. Ten years after that month of Dumas, Martin saw blood on the stairs of the Public Library. He forgot how it started—some kind of demonstration against the Austrian Consulate in the time of Dollfuss, and as Martin came out at the Fifth Avenue door, the police had just isolated a group of pickets and begun to club them systematically. One old man fell on the stairs, and as he struggled there two cops worked on him with blackjacks until his arm lay obviously broken under him and the blood spurted in a jet out of his open mouth. There were a great many demonstrations in New York along about then.

The bus crawled through the midtown blocks and into another jam before Rockefeller Center. Now here, Martin thought with something like exultation, is a miracle I watched grow slowly out of the ground. Lord Christ, if only we could keep the bombers off. Never mind the brisk gamblers in talent, the pink-faced pirates, the sure-thing boys in there. Radio City was a complex and splendid miracle. Martin had once worked in the largest of the buildings.

It took the bus a long time to reach Sherman's statue. Within a few hundred yards of this spot—on the hill overlooking the lake—Martin, at the age of seventeen, had kissed a blonde girl from Julia Richman High School. She had teeth the color of whipped cream. Underneath her middy blouse she wore a small silver cross, and on that cross he took an oath never to love another girl as long as he lived. It was the first time Martin had ever said "Darling" to a girl. For years afterward he managed to find different names for the others.

So many things had happened to Martin along this one beautiful avenue. Playing basketball at the Heckscher Foundation, he had broken his wrist, and a doctor with large, firm hands had set it for him at the Fifth Avenue Hospital next door. And in the Metropolitan Museum of Art he had served as a monitor at the Children's Sunday Story Hour every week during his last year of grade school. The lady lecturer had been very kind to him. She had walked with him time and again through the galleries on the ground floor and explained about Egyptian dynasties. What Martin had liked best was to sit alone in the great hall where they had knights in full armor, horse and all. He had liked, also, to stand inside the white replica of the Pantheon or to watch the live goldfish in the Roman Garden. And fifteen years later a friend of his sold a picture to the Museum and blew most of the money on an old motorboat and took Martin on a week's cruise along the Hudson.

Past the Carnegie house, a soldier came up and took a seat across the aisle. He leaned over and asked Martin if this bus would take him to the Cloisters. "I'm a stranger here," he said. "Will you tell me when to get off?"

"It's the last stop," Martin said. "You'll know when."

The soldier was a mild-looking boy, very young, but he had the insignia of a corporal in the infantry, and it occurred to Martin that this meant he must already have had some bayonet drill. He must already have learned to run the bayonet into a dummy (with a Hitler mustache on it, no doubt) and to brace a leg against the dummy's chest to facilitate withdrawal. Or was it only in living people that bayonets got stuck? At any rate, this boy had already been partly decivilized in the process of being trained to defend civilization, and now he was on his way to spend a quiet and possibly reverent interlude at the Cloisters.

Tomorrow, Martin would begin *his* de-education. All right, make it re-education then—tongues in tanks, books in bombs, sermons in sergeants, and good in everything. He would begin his own training to forget that institutions existed to promote the welfare of the individual rather than the other way around; for in order properly to defend and extend democracy, an army must divest its soldiers of their status as individuals in the outmoded sense.

It was too late for Martin to wonder if he had truly prepared himself to accept this. When different people asked why he had not waited to be drafted, he found himself advancing a series of trumped-up and contradictory reasons. "Maybe it's simple, or complex, or compound, curiosity that made me volunteer," he had said to his brother, "the curiosity of the rabbit about the snake, or of the cabbage, perhaps, about the rabbit."

From neutral 110th Street, the bus turned up Riverside Drive, where the city was beautiful again. The great bridge sparkled in the sunshine, and the white roads and green park wove into an arabesque below along the Hudson as far as Martin could see. There was humanity here in the imperial splendor of the city. The lawns around the trees were wide and accessible, hundreds of clean children played in the sand piles, and the one statue in sight was that of a good man, Louis Kossuth. Martin listened to the fresh voices of the children. This was the city of Whitman and Melville, of the Roeblings and the Olmsteds, and of the unknown good men who will someday tear down the houses of Harlem. If only we could keep the bombs from falling.

At Grant's Tomb, Martin got off and waved good-bye to the corporal, who smiled back at him. He walked across the Drive and the plaza and up the stairs of the building. Here, too, the air was filled with the fresh voices of children and the sound of roller skates.

Inside, under the yellow light, it was suddenly cool and silent. He looked down at the large coffin of the man for whom so many things had gone wrong, the stubborn, unhappy man buried so appropriately in this awkward structure. There was nothing else in there except a few dusty battle colors and an attendant selling souvenir postcards. Martin went out again. He sat down on a stone bench, facing the river.

Well, he thought, let's not be too hard on old Grant. It wasn't Grant's fault that the tanks named after him had been outmaneuvered in Libya; wasn't his fault that he liked to smoke his cigars with Jim Fisk rather than with Henry Adams. Fisk might have been better company, at that. And while Martin would no doubt have picked Adams, Grant was certainly entitled to his own preferences. Hadn't someone noted that there were three kinds of intelligence listed in the Britannica—Human, Animal, and Military? If only, beginning tomorrow, Martin could temporarily obliterate the first two and switch on that other. If only the three were not so indistinguishable, if only, if only . . . I hope I make a good soldier, he thought. I will have to try very hard.

A small boy came by and asked Martin if he wanted a shine. Unlike the hundreds of clean children in charge of the neat nursemaids along the Drive, this boy was very poorly dressed, though you could not, because of his dark skin, tell exactly how dirty he was. A Puerto Rican boy, probably, about ten or eleven. His curls were dusty and matted and he had a sweet, hesitant smile.

"Wuddia say?" he asked. "I'll make it good. Only a nickel. Wuddia say?"

"All right."

The boy laid out his kit and looked about furtively. Martin asked him if he was afraid of something.

"Cop," the boy said. "I ain't supposed to be working up here."

"All he can do is chase you off. I'll go with you."

"He can do more than chase. T'rows his stick when he can't get you."

The boy worked fast but kept a watch in all directions.

"What do you do with the money you earn?" Martin asked.

"Give it to my mother, mostly."

"What would you do with a dollar if you had it?"

"Wouldn't have a dollar."

"What if somebody gave you one, though?"

"Nobody'd give me a dollar. What would anybody want to give me a dollar for?"

"Look," Martin said. "Supposing *I* gave you a dollar. What would you do with it?"

"You wouldn't give me a dollar."

"Maybe I would. Supposing I did. Now, what would you do with it?"

"Give it to my mother, I guess."

"I mean if I gave you a dollar and said you had to spend it yourself. What would you buy?"

"Gun."

"What do you want a gun for?"

The boy shrugged. "Stick 'em up," he said. "Flash Gordon. Whango."

He finished his last few dabs with a flourish and Martin gave him a dollar.

"I ain't got change," the boy said.

"Keep it."

The boy turned the bill over. "What's this—a phony buck?"

"No, it's good."

"It's phony," the boy said. "Give me my nickel, Mister."

"The dollar's good, you dummy. Take it."

"Well, why don't you give it to me in change then?"

Martin took out his silver, but all he had was forty cents. The boy accepted it, returned the dollar, and ran away toward International House. Across the street he stopped and yelled, "Whango" at no one in particular. Then he ran off, out of sight.

At the age of ten, thought Martin, this one has already learned that if a stranger presents you with a dollar it's apt to be counterfeit. At nineteen, the gun he buys may well be a real one, and at twenty-three, in the city of Whitman and Melville, in Harlem, specifically, he will be selling his vote and looking through the five-dollar bill to see if it is good.

But maybe not. Maybe he'll do all right. Maybe he'll live to see the buildings of Harlem torn down and his own children playing, fresh and sweet, in the sand. There was a chance he might. The town was getting to look better all the time. So much of it looked pretty good right now.

Martin lit a cigarette and blew the smoke toward the Jersey side, where a silver transport plane was gaining altitude over the Palisades. Yes, on this day the town appeared to be in pretty good shape. If only, when he came back, it would take him in again, as it had twenty years ago. That he would come back after a while, Martin did not for a moment doubt.

Vacancy in Westchester

August, 1942

The first few months everyone had been lovely. All the other war wives from all the other little houses in Westchester had come over, pleasant young women who could be coaxed, often as not, into staying for dinner. Norman himself had managed to get home on leaves rather more frequently than the men who were sent down South. There had been some point to keeping the house then, but now, with Norman in the Solomons, Barbara wanted more than anything else to go someplace where they had people, activity, and human noises at night. She found herself unable to respond when women in neat uniforms spoke about the marvelous outlets to be found locally. For reasons she now and then conceded to be unsound and no doubt frivolous she did not believe that her part of Westchester was likely to be bombed.

She could understand Norman's wanting her to remain in their home. They had themselves drawn the plans for the house during the period of their engagement four years before, and they had watched it go up almost brick by brick. Much of the furniture was of Norman's own making. Just the month before his induction he had built some bookshelves to hold his photograph albums. He seemed to have a need to believe that the house was still there and Barbara in it. Had there been even the slightest chance of his coming home, if only for a weekend leave, she would not have thought of moving to the city. As it was, she did not know what to do.

Norman had been full of misconceptions about the way Barbara was to get on. In particular, he had repeatedly made himself clear on the subject of men. "Look, darling," he'd said, "we know where we stand. Nobody could confuse us now. You go out with anyone you like and as often as you like. Sure, they'll make passes at you—they'd be blind not to. You just handle them the way you handled me for more than a year. You'll know how to drop them if they get obnoxious. And there's always old Edgar to fall back on if it's an escort you need."

Old Edgar, who was thirty-one, had been fallen back on just twice. The second time, he took Barbara to a show in New York, fed her an extravagant meal at Voisin's, and tried to neck her in the car on the Saw Mill River Parkway. Afterward he had asked for Norman's address. He said he knew how much soldiers liked to get mail.

Two days later he called up. "Are you angry?" he asked.

"No."

"Free for dinner tomorrow?"

"No."

"Day after?"

"Afraid not."

"Then you are angry."

"No," she said. "Just don't want to see you."

"I'm sorry. I don't imagine an apology would help?"

"For God's sake, skip it. I just feel nasty, that's all. Call me up some other time, will you?"

She did not really want him to call again and he seemed to gather as much, because he never did. It was all she could do to keep from writing about him to Norman. Edgar had been their sole remaining unmarried friend in the vicinity. The rest had drifted away, and she only now grasped just why. Visiting at the homes of neighboring couples, she felt inadequate, unequal to handling what would have been Norman's end of the conversation, and essentially unsympathetic to the women's now meaningless little problems. She found herself spending a good deal of time at the tennis club, where, with a few exceptions like Neil Berrien, the people were too young.

Neil was new in town. He had just been employed by the club in some ambiguous capacity resembling that of a professional. When he gave Barbara her second lesson he laid such emphasis on the need to maintain the fiction of his amateur standing that she naturally asked why, and they had a talk over some bottles of Coca-Cola. It was the first time she ever noticed that he had two fingers missing from his left hand. Barbara thought she would not have been so sharply aware of such a flaw if he had not, in other respects, been so magnificently built.

"I have to remain an amateur," he said, "in order to win the National Championship."

"Don't tell me there is a chance you might. I wouldn't dare get on that court again. Are you ranked?"

"Not this year. Insufficient competition. Last year I was twelfth."

"Nationally?"

"Yes."

"Good Lord. I had no idea."

"I'm really better than twelfth, particularly now, with most of the good men turned pro. Does that surprise you?"

"Why, yes," she said, "a little. I thought of ranking tennis players as rather dull young men about twenty years of age."

"I know tournament playing is not usually regarded as an occupation for adults, but there are some of us at it. Every once in a while I have to remind myself that Tilden was over thirty when he hit his peak. If these missing fingers keep me out of the Army until the fall and I do well on the circuit, I have a pretty good chance of taking the National. Then I'd turn pro. It's the only way I'll ever make five thousand dollars in one piece."

"And then will you pay off the family mortgage?"

"Not exactly," Neil said. "But I have to put my hands on a chunk of money at least that large and in a hurry. Can you suggest some other way?"

After a while he told her why he wanted the five thousand. There was a girl he wanted to send to a good psychiatrist. The sanatorium where she now stayed was an inferior one, and for all he knew the people in charge were doing more harm than good.

"Well, don't let me get somber," he added. "Shall we try a few more rallies?"

Barbara did not think he felt like playing. "Not now," she said. "Tomorrow, perhaps. I think I'll go home and see if there's anything in the afternoon mail."

The hunch turned out well. She found a fine, fat letter from Norman. It started off all right, but by the second page she could tell he was feeling rotten. His handwriting was barely legible.

"There's a line everybody pulls here," he wrote. "Goes something like this: When you're down here a few weeks you start talking to yourself. After that you find yourself talking to the lizards. In another couple of weeks you find the lizards talking back to you. Then you find yourself listening."

His camera had been stolen by one of the comrades in arms. He'd been bitten by a species of sand fly and the infection, while not serious enough to require hospital treatment, kept him awake nights.

Then, after eight lines blotted out by the censor, the letter resumed in the middle of a sentence: ". . . get home I will sit in the tub for the first ten hours and you will bring me lime rickeys at regular intervals. After that I will go to bed and sleep for two days. Images like this keep me going.

"I've even succeeded in convincing myself that the war will be over in six months, so you can see my mind has also been slightly impaired. We should win—must, I guess. I'd run amuck if after all this, and I don't mean the sand flies, they made a compromise peace. Not that there has ever been a period of peace based on anything but a series of temporary and always disgraceful compromises. Never mind. I can't and don't want to think in Large Historical Perspectives at this point.

"When I get home, though, I will want to do some concentrated thinking. I don't believe I'll go back to work the first year. We'll sell the acreage on the lake and live on what we get for that. I will want to be alone, entirely alone with you in our house. Please drop the idea of renting it. I know living alone must present problems, but can't you get Mother or somebody to move in with you? I don't want any strangers having the run of the place. I hope I'm not being too arbitrary."

The letter ran to fourteen pages, but Barbara read it over several times. She sat down and answered it at once, although she had written only the day before. She told him she would not rent the house and went into all the details she knew he liked to read about—the flowers, the ivy, the vegetables, the badminton court. When she finished writing there was still an hour to go before dinner.

She did not have to look in the paper to know what programs were on the radio. It was the time for the most fatuous of the cereal serials. She walked upstairs aimlessly. The closet door was open. She took out an old blouse and sewed new buttons on it. Then she went downstairs and made a note to buy a permanent needle for the phonograph. She was looking at the shelves for a book to read when the bell rang.

At the door, Neil Berrien was holding onto his bicycle and smiling, a little awkwardly. He said, "I thought I'd come by, see if you wanted to have dinner with me at the Inn. We could walk down."

Barbara was glad to see Neil and she asked him to come in. Then, because she knew he did not have much money, she said, "Why don't we eat up here instead? It's the girl's night out and I was planning to get rid of all the leftovers in my refrigerator anyway."

"Thanks. Shall I ride downtown for some things?"

"I think I have everything. Tell you what you can do. See that bed of mint? Get a few sprigs and I'll stir up some drinks."

Mixing the Tom Collinses, she remembered that she hadn't had a drink since the stupid evening with Edgar. What a good idea it had been not to write Norman about that little occurrence. After he got home she would tell him, though, particularly if old Edgar insisted on coming around then. Norman would find other friends. He would certainly like this new man, Berrien. He had always complained about the lack of decent tennis players in the neighborhood. He would probably be familiar with Neil's tournament record for the last ten years.

Neil made himself useful in getting up the meal and afterward he helped with the dishes. Barbara was almost frightened to think how happy she felt over the presence of a man again in the kitchen—a stranger, yes, but pleasant and friendly. They had another round of Tom Collinses and sat in the wicker chairs on the porch. There was still some light in the west. The frogs were exceptionally loud that night.

"Norman must be a good man," he said. "I can see by his things. I'll never have a place like this."

"Why not?"

"Those five thousand dollars will stretch just so far."

"Do you really think you'll be able to get it?"

"I've got to," he said. "Fingers or no fingers, I couldn't very well stay out of the Army if I didn't have that money to earn. At least, so I tell myself."

"Are you sure it would cost that much?"

"With the doctor I have in mind, it would, and it's certain to mean a long, expensive hospital treatment. I might as well tell you what's wrong with her. It's a form of dementia praecox. It's sometimes curable, but you can never be sure. Still, if there's a chance in a million, she's got it coming. I'm in love with her."

He entered into some clinical detail with understanding and delicacy. He had obviously done a great deal of reading on the subject and struggled to maintain detachment. He said if the psychiatrist thought marriage would help her back to health, he would marry her. When he finished talking about her he grew less tense and spoke of the girls he had been going with recently. He was a little too self-consciously casual, Barbara thought, in what he said about some of the girls at the club, but he mentioned no names. Then somewhat out of context, he asked Barbara if she was in love with Norman.

"Yes," she said. "Very much."

"I thought so. I'm glad."

They did not speak for a long time. If he tries to kiss me now, she thought, I will kiss him, because he also is alone—no, because he is so beautiful—and then I will make him go away. He must not come here again.

Neil got to his feet and said he'd been keeping her up late enough and what a good evening he'd had and would she be at the club tomorrow. She said she didn't know. They shook hands and he rode away on the bicycle.

Barbara went back to the living room. The door of the liquor cabinet was open, and she poured herself a jigger of Norman's brandy. How lucky it was that she had not asked Neil to mail that letter to the Solomons. The house must be rented. She must not have Neil coming here. She would have to move to the city, where they had people, movement, activity, and human noises at night. She threw herself on the couch and buried her head in the cushions to shut out the croaking of the frogs. First thing tomorrow she would place an ad in one of the Sunday papers.

I Hope You'll Understand

January, 1945

The baby was still awake in his bed when Margaret finished cleaning up after supper. She stopped in the living room and listened to his chant. The nonsense syllables came in a delightful rippling sequence. Was it possible for a baby to show musical talent at the age of two? She must remember to ask Doctor Neurath or to look it up in one of the books.

Margaret had not had a chance to read the care-and-feeding books for a long time. She could afford a cleaning woman only once a week now, and looking after both the apartment and the baby tied her down completely. The apartment was too near a coal chute on the East River and she had to dust the two small rooms and the battered old kitchen several times a day. Now, at eight-thirty, she was expecting her husband's mother, and she still had not been able to change her dress.

She washed quickly. As she turned to get the towel, she saw herself in the full-length mirror and she thought of something odd. Returning from China, Ben would be accustomed to the sight of tiny, slender Chinese girls. Very possibly he would find her strapping, clumsy, gross. Ben was not a large man, barely taller than she. He had been wonderfully loving and kind during the last months of her pregnancy, but who in the world could tell how he would feel next year or the year after? *I* can, she thought. He loves me and I love him. And we have the prettiest and most gifted baby of all time.

She got into the blue satin hostess gown, Ben's extravagant wedding-anniversary gift of three years ago. It was a beautiful dress, even as reflected in a pockmarked, cracked old mirror.

That was the way with everything in this apartment. The flimsy tablecloths had been recently acquired, but the silver was old and first-rate. The bed was of the cheapest maple obtainable, while the chest of drawers had been acquired by one of Ben's forebears directly from Thomas Sheraton. Margaret's dress was beautiful, but her hands were red from the baby's wash.

The bell rang and she went to open the door for Mrs. Temple.

"Hello. Come in," said Margaret. She had never been able to bring herself to call Mrs. Temple "Mother."

"Lord, dear girl. This neighborhood of yours. I was nearly run down by a frightful, shrieking boy on a bicycle. I honestly do not see how you stand it."

Margaret made sympathetic sounds. Mrs. Temple went with the good silver and the Sheraton. More precisely, the good silver and the Sheraton had come from Mrs. Temple. Margaret remembered how guilty she had felt about accepting them.

Mrs. Temple had not approved of Ben's marriage. She had, not unnaturally, wanted Ben to finish law school, and when Ben left to marry and to take a poorly paid job in the Department of Parks, they all had a fairly grim few months of it. After the marriage, Mrs. Temple found herself alone in a still genteel residential block in the Murray Hill section, with the prospect of living out her days on something like fifty thousand dollars invested at four per cent. Nothing short of catastrophe could have induced her to live off capital. People did not live off capital. The astounding thing was that on two thousand a year she contrived to look altogether as if she had just stepped out of a 1921 Rolls-Royce—the black kind, with lanterns on the side. Her hair was white and held in place by a net. Her skin had remained fresh and, though she wore no makeup, almost rosy. She had her own teeth—good, strong teeth. And if worse came to worse, thought Margaret, Warner Brothers would certainly not fail to give her work as a dress extra in big Monte Carlo or Newport scenes. Margaret's background had been plebeian enough for her to regard Mrs. Temple's lorgnette as a symbol of caste.

The baby kept up his sweet chant, and Margaret thought she recognized snatches of a song she had sung during the afternoon:

Shoo, fly, don't bother me;
I belong to somebody.

Was it possible? Could he actually be carrying the tune?

"I'd love to go in and see him," Mrs. Temple said. "Dare I? He'll never go to sleep if I do."

"Well, you remember what happened the last time."

"I'll wait till he goes to sleep. Margaret dear, I just can't tell you what a wonderful job I think you've done with him. Do you know what I wrote Benjamin about it this morning? I wrote that if I spent the rest of the day dreaming up a grandson, I couldn't do better than Baby Tom. I'm not a gushing old woman, but he's simply everything that a baby should be."

Margaret suddenly felt very happy.

"What worries me," Mrs. Temple went on, "is his growing up in this neighborhood. He'll soon be old enough to play with other children—touching them, picking up their ways. Dear, I do wish we could work out some arrangement for us all to live together in a decent section of town."

"Would you like a bite to eat?" Margaret asked. "Something to drink?"

"Not now, thanks," Mrs. Temple said. "I had an early light supper with Mrs. Neilson. None too pleasant, I must say. She insisted on talking exclusively about her boy. He's just Benjamin's age, a lieutenant commander in the Navy, and attached to the embassy in London. How well she knows that Benjamin is a sergeant and doing greasy mechanic's chores heaven knows where in China. How splendid of Benjamin, she said. I told her, 'Sarah, it just so happens I *really* think it's splendid.' I told her that. It's those greasy mechanics who are winning this war."

"I don't think Ben minds the greasy part of it at all," Margaret said. "The only worry that crops out of his letters is that he can't send us more money. Ben likes working on airplanes. And he must be good at it if the squadron commander picked him for a ground-crew chief."

"All the same, it's a little hard to take," Mrs. Temple said. "One might suppose the Army would have found a more appropriate place for Benjamin, if only out of regard to his family record. Entirely aside from the boy's own merits, which are certainly not inferior to Frank Neilson's."

Mrs. Temple had arrived at her moment of genealogy. It came earlier than Margaret had expected, but the effect of having been with Mrs. Neilson had apparently carried over.

"Benjamin," said Mrs. Temple, "had commissioned officers serving under Washington on both sides of his family. His great-grandfather was a brevet major general and for a time Burnside's chief of staff. His great-uncle was a commandant of West Point. And even his father, not a military man, served as a major in the last war. If Benjamin had had the enterprise to apply for a commission, stating all these facts, there is not the shadow of a doubt that the War Department would have acted favorably. Even after induction, if Benjamin had gone to his commanding officer, a record of that sort could not have failed to have its effect. Why *will* he be so stubborn?"

I could tell you why, Margaret thought. Exactly why. "I think you're right," she found herself saying. "Ben is sorry now that he didn't make more of an effort to be commissioned. For purely financial reasons, he says."

"Yes, there's that, too. I'm only thankful he can't see this place his son is living in, clean as you manage to keep it, dear. Margaret, we must work out some way of moving you away from here. I know it's not pleasant to live with an old woman who appears to be so set in her ideas, but don't you agree that the baby is entitled to the best we can provide out of our pooled resources? Don't answer me now, dear, but think about it, do."

"Tom must be asleep," said Margaret. "He hasn't stirred for some time now. Would you like to go in?"

"Indeed I would."

They went into the bedroom and stood in silent adoration before the golden baby. Tom had thrown his covers off and lay on his back, arms spread out. He was a deeply bronzed, sturdy boy. He smiled a little in his sleep.

"Della Robbia," Mrs. Temple whispered.

The doorbell rang, and they both tiptoed quickly back to the living room.

"Now, who can that possibly be?" said Margaret.

She opened the door. In the hallway stood an Army officer with many ribbons and a pair of silver wings on his chest.

"Brown's my name," he said. "You're Mrs. Ben Temple?"

"How do you do," Margaret said. "Is Ben all right?"

"He's fine. He's in great shape."

"Oh, marvelous. Gosh. This is his mother. Come in. Sit down, won't you? Here, I'll take your hat. Don't mind me. I'm a little flustered."

"How do you do, Major," Mrs. Temple said.

He's a major, then, Margaret thought. I never even noticed. And he knows Ben. Just come from there, perhaps.

"I'm Ben's commanding officer," Major Brown said. "He's my crew chief. I was back here for a thirty-day rest, but now I'm on my way to China again. I didn't know if I'd get a chance to look you up, so I never told Ben I would. I ought to be seeing him in a few days."

"This is extraordinary," Margaret said. "I can't collect my wits. Is he all right? Healthy?"

"He's just fine."

"Can I get you a drink? Scotch is all I have."

Major Brown laughed. "I must tell that to the boys," he said. "Is Scotch really all you have? The boys will love that. Yes, some Scotch would hit the spot all right." He looked around. "So this is where Ben lives. Pretty nice place you got here."

"No, this is not where Benjamin lived," Mrs. Temple said. "Margaret is staying here temporarily. Apartments are next to impossible to find now in New York."

"Looks pretty keen to me," Major Brown said.

Margaret went out to the kitchen and brought in a bottle of Scotch, half full. Ben had been the last to drink out of it, a year before. She now saw Major Brown for the first time. He was twenty-eight or thirty, fleshy, slightly bald. He had a good, broad face, friendly eyes. He lit one cigarette from the stub of another.

"I was saying to your mother-in-law, Ben's a good boy to have around."

"I know," Margaret said.

"It gets pretty rough out there and you appreciate a good man around you. He'll work all night on an engine when he has to, and in the morning you can bet your life on it. You can and you do. That's a fact."

"I always did maintain he knew as much about cars as any professional mechanic," Mrs. Temple said, "though I never dreamed he would end up as one."

"What sort of place does he live in?" Margaret asked. "Is the food as adequate as he says it is?"

"Well, his quarters aren't what you'd call scrumptious. It's a big building and it keeps the rain out is about all you could say. But the food wasn't bad when I left. We were all getting plenty of chicken along about then. I can't hardly say what it's like now."

"How does Ben seem to you? Fairly well adjusted?"

"Ben's a pretty steady boy from all I can see. He don't—I mean, he doesn't—cut up and kid around like some, but I've never seen him real low, the way others can get out there. He just moseys along kind of, and everybody likes him."

Major Brown drank his Scotch straight. He put away two good-sized drinks in less than ten minutes and Margaret poured him a third.

"Is there any chance of his coming home on a furlough?" she asked. "Or of rotation going into effect soon?"

"No, not right soon," he said. "Good crew chiefs are pretty hard to come by these days."

"Will that hurt his chances of being commissioned, Major?" Mrs. Temple said.

"I don't know. There's some rules about education, I guess. Has Ben been to college?"

"Four years of Amherst and one of Columbia Law," Mrs. Temple said. "It's odd, your bringing that up, because Margaret and I were discussing it just before you came in. You know, if Benjamin were not commissioned before the end of the war, he would be the first of his family ever to have served as an enlisted man."

"Yes, Ma'am," Major Brown said.

"Both sides of his family had commissioned officers in the Revolutionary War. His great-grandfather was a brevet major general in the Civil War and his great-uncle commanded at West Point. And even his father, not a military man, as I was telling Margaret, served as a major in the last war."

"Ben never told us any of that," Brown said. "It goes to show you."

He kept lighting his cigarettes, one from another, and drinking the Scotch, too, without apparent effect. Margaret watched his active, stubby fingers. She didn't know whether she liked him or not. This was Ben's commanding officer and Ben had to do as he said. He had a good face, but his eyes looked away from you and his hands wouldn't remain still for a moment. Perhaps he, too, was embarrassed by Mrs. Temple.

"Yes, Ma'am," he said, "it goes to show you. Some guys you never really know about. I was out there two and a half years in the same squadron with a fellow and I never knew he was married until he got killed and I had to write his wife."

"Does Benjamin ever go out on missions?" Mrs. Temple asked.

"No, Ma'am."

"Were you out there two and a half years before you got this thirty-day rest?" Margaret asked.

"Yes."

"And only thirty days," Mrs. Temple said.

"It was all I wanted, and more," Major Brown said. "I don't like it much back here in the States. Guys told me I wouldn't, but I had to see for myself. Right now I've seen all I want to see of the United States for a spell. Out in C.B.I., at least you know where you're at. You know what's expected of you and you do it. You know who your friends are and you act according."

He looked at the floor while he talked, and Margaret and Mrs. Temple glanced at each other.

"It's a pity you feel that way," Mrs. Temple said.

"I'm not the only one," Brown said. "Take my first day back here. Down in Florida. I check into a hotel and I pay six dollars for the night. Next day, the manager says I got to move out; it's Friday, and there's a woman coming in. She pays ten. 'Where am I going to move?' I said. 'There's not a room to be had in Miami Beach. You're the ninth hotel I tried last night.' This man just shrugs."

Major Brown took a drink. "All right. I had no clothes other than the ones I wore and those were in shreds. I go into a place and I ask for a pair of pants and a shirt, tropical worsted. Thirty-five dollars. I ask for a set of these ribbons. Fruit salad, we call them. Brag rags. But I earned them and I want to wear them. So I ask for this set of six. They ought to be about a dime apiece. The man charges me two and a half dollars. A quarter for each of these little campaign stars. And that's the way it's been with everything. Everybody out for what they can make off you."

"You paint a frightful picture," Mrs. Temple said.

"Only what I've seen. Take even the Army back here. I got a friend—a lieutenant colonel. He's been in action since the first day in the Philippines. He comes back here and they put him in the Training Command. But before he can teach, he's got to take a refresher course under a second lieutenant who knows the equipment. Fair enough. But every morning he's got to salute this kid. All that kind of stuff. Not for me. I'm going back to my own outfit, where you know who's who and what's what. I belong and Ben Temple belongs and we know where we stand."

"You'll forgive us," Mrs. Temple said, "for hoping that Benjamin doesn't share *all* your views on the subject."

"Well, sure, Ma'am. It's different when you got a family like this. But there's plenty of fliers are going to stay right on in China when the war is over, family or no family."

"Do you think so?" Margaret asked.

"I know it. When this war is over, there'll still be fighting in China for years to come. There'll still be Communists and war lords and provinces who'll be wanting to have it out. Lots of loose change for good fliers to pick up. I know I'll stay on if they give me the right equipment."

Margaret laughed. She remembered now Ben's writing that Major Brown was a good man to work for. That, after all, was the main thing. It didn't matter if the Major failed to see the similarity between his postwar plans and the attitude of the man who had overcharged him for the ribbons.

"You're very persuasive," she said.

"Well, I sound like I'm doing a snow job," he said, "but those are my feelings. I like it out there. When you work you work, and when you play you play. You've got a pretty good outfit, and you know where you're at. Sometimes the play gets a little rough, but I guess Ben has written you all about that. Still, I wanted to tell you myself how it happened."

Margaret said, "How what happened?"

"I mean about Ben's wound."

"Ben wounded?"

"I thought he'd written you."

"He has not," Mrs. Temple said.

Margaret stood up halfway and sat down again.

"I was positive he'd written you," Major Brown said. "It wasn't much of a wound. Slug just passed through the lower part of his calf. He was up and around, back on the job, in a couple of weeks."

"He never gave me so much as a hint," said Margaret.

"Nor me," Mrs. Temple said.

"He didn't want to worry you, I guess. Kind of a silly way it happened. No excuse for it. My fault, mostly. That's why I thought I'd come and tell you about it. I was going to get here before this, but I couldn't make connections. Fact is, I ought to be going now."

"Can you just tell us what happened?" Margaret asked.

Major Brown overturned his full ashtray. He apologized. He started to clean up, but Margaret prevailed on him to stop. He looked at the bottle and she poured him another drink. Mrs. Temple took out her knitting, a familiar sign that she was struggling for composure.

"Well, we got a Captain Mayer out there," said Brown, "and he's kind of young and kind of a gagster. Used to rig up practical jokes all the time. He doesn't any more, I can tell you. But back around three months ago he nailed both my flying boots and my G.I. shoes to the floor one night. Solid against the floor, with these big, two-inch nails. Well, we had an alert before sunrise, and I couldn't pry those shoes off to save my life. Had to chase up twenty thousand feet with nothing but my socks on. Lost three of my toes from the frostbite. So I come highballing back fit to tie. I didn't have to ask who'd nailed those shoes down. I knew. Let me say I was going to scare that boy Mayer, scare him good. I did, too. I aimed between his knees with this little old Jap pistol, and the slug went through the wooden partition and hit Ben in the leg. But, as I say, he was up and around in a very short time, and a real sport about it."

"My God," Margaret said.

"Now, Ben'll bear me out. That's exactly the way it happened. But I wanted to tell you how sorry I am. It was just one of those things, and I wanted to explain about it in person. Ben is still crewing for me, because he likes to and I wouldn't have anybody else. That's how we feel about the whole thing, and I hope you'll understand, being his wife and his mother."

"Was it a painful wound?" Mrs. Temple asked.

"No, Ma'am. I can honestly say it wasn't."

He didn't write me about it, Margaret thought. Things happen to him and he doesn't tell me. She said, "And he's perfectly all right now?"

"Fit as a fiddle," Major Brown said. "Ben's a rugged boy. He'll work all night on an engine, and he'll make it sing. I'll be glad to see him again."

"Send him home when you can, won't you?" Margaret said.

"I'll do that little thing," said Major Brown, laughing. "You bet."

In standing up, he overturned the ashtray once more, and the pewter bowl rolled over against the bedroom door. The baby began to cry.

"Darn it," he said. "I seem to be all elbows tonight. I better get going before I wreck the place. Is there anything particular you want to send Ben?"

The baby cried as if badly frightened.

"I can't think of anything offhand. Can you, Mrs. Temple?"

"It'll be another week before I finish this sweater," Mrs. Temple said.

"Well, I was glad to have met you both," Major Brown said.

As the apartment door closed, Margaret ran into the bedroom and picked up the sobbing baby.

"Poor little Tom," she said. "You're all wet and frightened. Here, little boy."

It was some minutes before she could soothe him. Mrs. Temple looked in at the door, but decided she had better stay outside. Margaret changed Tom and rocked him to sleep.

He was sleeping soundly in her arms when the coal chute on the river began to rattle. Then he started up with a whimper and groped for Margaret's face and hair with both hands. In a way, she was thankful for an excuse not to go out into the living room again. She wanted to stay with the baby. And she hated the harsh noise of the chute. I must move Tom away from here, she thought.

"Walk, walk," Tom said.

She stood up and walked back and forth in the little room, with the baby nestling against her. Through a slit in the doorway she could see Mrs. Temple knitting.

Margaret stopped for a moment and thought, I will not share an apartment with her. I'll wait for Ben to come back. Then, if she died soon we could have her money and we could live in a clean place, Ben and Tom and I. If only she would die.

The Volcano

October, 1947

Paul slammed the brakes on. His car came to a shrieking stop just in time to miss the rear end of a yellow bus. If the driver hadn't speeded up, there would certainly have been a collision. Paul waited for the man to stop and jump out to speak his mind. The bus had incontestably had the right of way. Paul had come out of a side road, oblivious of the stop sign. But the driver lacked either the time or the inclination to make a fuss and continued on the road to Oyster Bay without cutting his speed. Paul was grateful. He sat rigid behind the wheel of his stalled car, smelling burned rubber, tasting the residue of terror.

He wondered if he'd been guilty of any other traffic violations in the fifteen miles he'd travelled since crossing the Queensboro Bridge. He remembered coming down from his office and getting into the car, but he must have driven the rest of the way on little more than instinct. I'll have to be careful next time, he thought. Then it occurred to him that there would not be a next time.

He would never drive precisely the same route again, because his office was no longer his office. As of an hour ago, he had no office. For the first time since the age of twenty-six—twelve years now—he had no job. The sudden terror that, with the approach of the yellow bus, had flooded his entire body yielded to the memory of the dull panic of the years after college, when there had been no jobs at all, only receptionists asking his name and address. Paul had been strafed once on Guam, and then, too, his momentary terror had dissolved into the memory of those years, which had forever defined for him the quality of fear.

A light rain was starting to fall. The stalled engine kicked right off, and so did the windshield wipers. At least I have a good car, Paul thought. Twelve years ago, I couldn't have afforded a bicycle.

He drove the few miles home slowly and with care. He parked the car in the garage and went through the storage room into the kitchen. There he found the Brissendens' cook, whom Nancy sometimes borrowed for special occasions.

"Who's coming for dinner?" he asked.

"Two people," the old woman said. "I don't know their names, sir."

"I do," said Paul. "The Marriners. I'd forgotten all about it."

Nancy had just begun to set the table. She came to meet Paul in the middle of the living room. They kissed. She looks no more like the mother of a seven-year-old girl than I do, he thought. She looks like half of a very young couple picked to serve as photographic models for an illustrated article on prefabricated housing. Attractive, capable, smiling, and appropriately venturesome.

"You're so early," she said.

"I wish the Marriners weren't coming tonight."

"Darling, I thought you liked them."

"I do," he said. "Where's Jen?"

"Upstairs. She's taking her bath alone. She announced she didn't need help any more, and showed me how she could reach the small of her back."

Paul considered putting off his own announcement but decided against it. "Sit down," he said. "I quit my job."

"High time," said Nancy. "I don't have to sit down for that, but I will. I'm glad."

"I had to do it. This afternoon, I went into McDonald's office and he showed me an ad that's going to run in the Sunday papers. I wish I'd brought the proof home. It had a picture of that first house I did after I got out of the service. You know, the little Cape Cod. I can't remember all the nauseating copy that went with it. Straight-from-the-shoulder stuff from James McDonald to the veterans of America. How he knew they were sick of talk, talk, plans, plans, so he was offering them a *house* to live in—*now*. It was designed by a veteran—that's me—built by one—that's him—and it had this, that, and the other thing, all for eleven and a half thousand dollars. Nancy, that's a six-thousand-dollar house. To ask eleven and a half and brag that you're doing it to discharge the loyal duty of a former comrade-in-arms—Christ! And then he had the gall to patronize me about my name being run in the ad."

"I hope you told him off."

"Not the way I should have. I guess I wasn't very good. I did manage to say he was selling gold bricks and I didn't want any part of it. Listen, that ad was enough to turn your stomach. From one G.I. to another. I bet not twenty per cent of the men who buy those houses will be able to keep them. But they have to buy, because they have no place to live. Anyway, I told him to keep my name out of it."

"How did he take that?"

"More in sorrow. I wish you'd been there to hear him, Nancy. He said he realized I'd been disaffected for some time. Nancy, he's such an operator he actually had me shaking hands before I knew it. And, driving home, I wondered if I would've quit if my name hadn't been on that damn ad."

"Certainly you would've, in time," said Nancy. "That place has been doing things to you. I'm awfully glad you're out of there."

"You're not worried?"

"What about?"

"About my being out of a job."

"That's silly," she said. "You'll find another. You could get on the telephone now and come up with a job in half an hour. I only hope this time you'll pick and choose until you find something you like."

"You're fairly certain I can do that?"

"Absolutely certain. Aren't you?"

"No," Paul said. "I'm not. I've already smoked two packages of cigarettes about it, and the day isn't over. I wish the Marriners weren't coming."

"Well, it's a good thing they are. At least, they'll keep you from stewing all evening. Gosh, what is there to stew about? Supposing you were out of work for a whole year, we still have the house and enough money to live on. For two years, if necessary."

"I was once out of work for three."

"You were a kid out of college," she said. "Nobody knew you. And most architects were unemployed then, weren't they?"

"That's just it. That's just the way it could happen again."

"What if it did? People like us could always make a living."

Paul looked at his wife attentively. No question about it, she was not being the brave little woman. She was utterly convinced that no matter what happened, people like them could always make a living. She had no reason to think otherwise. Her parents had not been better off than his, but there was that all-important difference of ten years in age; Nancy had just turned twenty-eight. All her friends had walked into good war jobs straight from college. None of them had left his name and address with two hundred brisk receptionists. How could she know what a depression was like?

Then again, it may not be a matter of generations so much as of temperament, he thought. Louise, his first wife, had had the same attitude. If two hundred receptionists turn you away, go see the two-hundred-and-first.

How could Nancy really know what simple lack of money can do to people? If he and Louise had been able to earn as much as fifteen hundred a year between them, there might never have been a divorce. There would never have been the time of living first with his parents, then hers—the strain, the tears, the panic of insecurity, the sordid little humiliations of dependence. Even now, with a house of his own and enough money to live on comfortably for two years, Paul could be frightened by a corner druggist's casual remark about a depression to come. The druggist knew no more about it than the taxi-driver or the shoeshine man, but they all said sure enough, a depression was on its way. Very likely they were right.

"If I could tell you about being unemployed," Paul said. "But I can't. The idea of another depression scares the hell out of me. I used to worry about it in the Pacific. This sounds goofy, but I used to think about the national debt and all those brand-new bulldozers rusting away on the islands, sinking into jungle. I used to think someone will have to pay for that equipment and the hundred thousand planes we built and everything else. You don't worry about any of that, do you?"

"Darling, what good does it do to think way ahead about things you can't control?"

Nancy got up and went back to the dining room. She had chosen her best tablecloth for the Marriners, a crisp and shining damask. Ken and Helen Marriner were fine, cheerful people, and ordinarily Paul looked forward to their coming, but tonight the idea of making cheerful talk was distasteful to him. He didn't feel funny. Neither did he relish the prospect of sitting glumly through dinner while Ken tried to keep the ball rolling.

Nancy set out the flat silver.

"You know what you remind me of?" Paul asked. "You remind me of those villagers near Mount Etna. They know that if there's an eruption, their homes will be buried under lava, but it doesn't seem to bother them."

Nancy smiled. "It's a long time between eruptions. What do you want us to do—sit and stew?"

"Why do *I* stew? Was it those two hundred receptionists? Or something that happened when I was a month old? Don't you ever get panicky?"

"No," she said, "not really. Not except when Jen gets sick. Even then, I've had a kind of faith that everything would turn out all right for people I love. Is that stupid?"

"I don't know. Does this faith of yours exclude people you don't love?"

"I'm afraid I just don't think nearly often enough about them."

"Well, look," Paul said. "What about Joe Dietz? In a way, you could say we loved him. There was no wind that day to speak of, nothing that would make trouble for a B-29. Everybody comes down nicely, but before Joe's airplane hits the runway, a cross wind makes it ground-loop, and Joe's burned to death. Just an arbitrary gust of wind that no one could have reckoned on. Anyway, it seemed arbitrary to me on Guam. And it seems arbitrary now. Can your scheme of things account for it?"

"It's not a scheme."

"Your faith, then. How does you faith account for one airplane taxiing in safe and the next one going up in flames?"

"My faith doesn't account for everything," Nancy said. "But it accounts for a lot. Most important of all, it works."

"It does, at that," Paul said. "You're lucky."

"There's one thing my faith won't accomplish, and that's putting Jen to bed before the Marriners come. You'll have to do it while I get things done here. She's already been in the tub too long."

Paul went upstairs slowly. He had eagerly looked forward to his last day with the firm of James McDonald and it hadn't worked out quite as he had thought it would. He had expected McDonald to be indignant and flustered, but McDonald had chosen not to regard the resignation as final and to remain unruffled, plausible, rather avuncular to the end. He had offered Paul an increase in salary and shaken hands, secure in the assumption that the offer would do its slow, inevitable work.

After Paul had left the office, he had stopped in at the corner drugstore for a carton of cigarettes. The clerk had started chattering about the depression to come. The clerk was a young man, no older than Nancy, and he talked blithely of the depression as a necessary, desirable antidote to the absurd prices. He, too, must have a kind of faith that things would right themselves in the long run, the faith of the generation that had stepped into war jobs, the faith of the young people whose side had won, after all, and now possessed the most ingenious of gadgets.

Jen was having herself a bubble bath. The pinned-up hair made her look even more like a miniature Nancy. Each time Paul was struck by the resemblance, he loved them both the more for it. He bundled her in a large towel and carried her to the bedroom. They talked for a good half hour about things that had happened to her during the day. Then Paul went through the first part of the going-to-bed ritual, the story about Frankie and Johnny.

For more than a year now, Paul had kept that story going in daily installments. Frankie and Johnny were two sailors. In the original chapter, they'd been shipwrecked on a desert island and fended manfully for themselves; there was only a gossamer line of continuity in the installments that followed. Jen clearly preferred this serial to Grimm, Andersen, or Donald Duck, and Paul loved to entertain her. Frankie and Johnny had crossed the Gobi Desert, eaten the hump of a camel, hunted polar bears, got stuck in an elevator between floors near the top of the Empire State. All the chapters ended on a gay note.

Tonight, Paul had Frankie and Johnny take a little girl to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, a little girl just about Jen's age and with her kind of brown hair, blue eyes, and laughing mouth.

"Was it me?" Jen asked when the story was over.

"No. I told you her name was Mabel. I'll take you myself sometime."

Jen was sleepy, but she tried to keep Paul in the room a little longer.

"I know a joke," she said. "It's about Mommy. When Mommy was a little girl just about my size and my kind of hair and nose, she wanted a baby brother and she asked Grandma for a baby brother. So the next day Grandma took her into a big room with a crib in it and there was a blanket in there and pretty soon something moved under the blanket. What do you think it was?"

"I don't know," Paul said.

"Do you think it was a puppy?"

"Was it?"

"No," she said. "Do you think it was a kitten?"

"Was it?"

"No. Do you think it was a dead rat?"

"Dead rats can't move."

"But Uncle Albert can," said Jen triumphantly. "It was Uncle Albert all the time."

They both laughed, and Paul performed the last part of the ritual. He puffed up her pillow, patted her knees under the blanket, stroked her cheeks, and tucked her in. He mumbled the magic sounds warranted to produce pleasant dreams. She kissed him. Paul felt his entire body fill with an access of barely supportable tenderness.

Downstairs, Nancy had finished setting the table. She said, "Ken Marriner called this morning to say they'll be a little late. Helen called, too."

"Helen Marriner?"

"No, your sister Helen. I forgot to tell you when you came in. She called to say Louise has been hit by an automobile. I couldn't make out exactly what she wanted you to do. Louise's husband is probably at the hospital with her, and I shouldn't think he'd want a first husband also hovering about. Helen didn't know what kind of injury it was, but it may have been serious. Louise'd been standing on the curb, waiting for a light to change, and a delivery truck went out of control. The driver was killed outright."

"My God!" Paul said. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I'm afraid I forgot. You were so full of having quit the job and all that talk about faith, I guess I wasn't thinking very clearly."

"I'll ring Helen. Maybe she knows more now."

Paul dialled several times, but there was no answer.

"I hope it isn't too bad," said Nancy.

"It must have been bad if Helen called me," Paul said. "I haven't seen Louise since last summer, when I ran into her at Helen's. She seemed so happy then. She was crazy about her husband and her children and the place they have. And now a thing like this. Standing on the curb, feeling pretty good, maybe, and then all of a sudden the bottom drops out. It's senseless. Arbitrary."

"She'll probably be all right, dear."

Paul tried his sister's number again, but there was still no answer. He dismissed the possibility of calling Louise's husband. They had never met, for one thing, and Louise might not have been seriously hurt.

Louise had looked very young and happy that time at Helen's. She had talked about how providentially things had turned out for both Paul and her. In the years since the divorce, she had apparently become religious, because she'd also said something about having prayed for Paul while he was in the service. Louise, too, was like the villagers around Mount Etna. If lava sweeps over your home, wait until it cools, then go back and rebuild.

There had even been a nostalgic few minutes of talk about college days. In their senior year, Paul's low-cost housing project had won a medal; Louise had helped by drawing some symmetrical shrubbery. The idea was for her to do the landscaping on all his projects—a big job, since these encompassed most of lower Manhattan, the South Side of Chicago, and large areas of Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. Nancy had been told about these schemes only in the indulgently contemptuous manner reserved for the excesses of one's youth. Yet the schemes had had a core of enchanting enthusiasm, lost now, but Louise had remembered.

"I wonder how many divorced women took the trouble to pray for their former husbands in the service," Paul had said to her that time at Helen's.

Louise had smiled. He knew that she had truthfully prayed for him. She truthfully, and not merely in public, wished him well. Things had worked out so happily for her she could afford to. But perhaps she might have wished him well in any event. Louise was kind. Their marriage had to end the way it did because they were both too young and had no money at all, but sooner or later Louise was bound to make a go of it with someone. Like Nancy, she was biologically sound. Her children must adore her. Like Nancy, she had faith. But while Nancy's faith was personal and vague, Louise had been able to recapture her specific, ancestral Presbyterian creed.

Paul watched Nancy preparing the ingredients for salad in a bowl on the sideboard. I'd like to have a faith, he thought. Faith without works is dead, it says in the Bible. What about works without faith?

I do good works. I'm good to my car. I change the oil every thousand miles. I've found a warm cave for Nancy and Jen. I've kept them supplied with meat and edible roots. I contribute to the Red Cross. All I need is faith. With a little faith, I could be looking as young as Louise and not have to chain-smoke. With Nancy's faith, I could take my time and find a good job and not stew about depressions and such. All faiths are in impulse and in essence the same—the necessary, desperate faith of the trapeze artist in the reflexes of his partner, the faith of the radish in a certain amount of annual rainfall.

"If you want to surprise me with a present tomorrow," said Nancy, "pick up a few candles to go with this tablecloth." She sat down on the davenport.

Then his sister telephoned and told him, hysterically, that Louise was dead. They had taken Louise to the hospital with a brain injury, and she had never regained consciousness.

He came back into the living room and told Nancy.

"Dreadful," she said. "Are they sure?"

"Yes. Helen was in the hospital when it happened. I couldn't get all the details out of her. They don't think the driver was drunk or anything. The truck went out of control and sideswiped her on the curb."

"Just standing on the curb like that and then out of the blue," Nancy said. "It's horrible. The whole thing *is* so senseless."

Paul sat down near her. Their knees touched.

"You say she was happy," Nancy said. "I think of her children. How can things like this happen?"

"I don't know. It's like Joe groundlooping in that B-29. I don't know how things like this happen. They happen all the time. That's supposed to make it all right."

"No, it isn't all right. It's awful. But there's nothing we can do."

Paul said, "You leave your house in the morning to buy something, and an hour later you're dead and your children have no mother. Thirty thousand people a year, or whatever it is. Slaughtered on the roads."

"It's awful. But, darling, what can we do? Thank God she didn't suffer. I hope her husband finds someone kind to look after the children."

"I'm thinking about Louise," Paul said. "She seemed so secure and happy at Helen's."

"I've never known anyone who got killed except in the war," said Nancy. "And now someone you've loved. You did love her, didn't you?"

"Very much."

"I believe you sort of loved her last summer at Helen's. From the way you talked."

"Last summer?" Paul said. "No, last summer I envied her. Admired and envied her. I wanted to be like her. And like you."

"Are we so much—I mean, am I like her?"

He noticed that Nancy had withdrawn her knee. He said, "Just this one thing. You're both able to take things as they come. You don't get panicky. You go back and rebuild on the lava. I'm talking as if she were alive. I wonder what that faith of hers was really like. I wonder how it accounted for drunks at the wheel."

"But you said this driver wasn't drunk."

"There're plenty who are. Right now, a thousand drunks are on the highway. All over the country. I wonder how her particular faith accounted for that."

"You're upset," she said. "I know it's a dreadful thing to have happen to someone you've loved. But, Paul—"

"I could use a little of that faith. Some nice, simple, literal faith. I could look stricken now and click my tongue twice and decide she's with Joe Dietz and how fond they'll grow of each other."

Nancy stood up. "I'll mix you a drink," she said.

"I don't want a drink. Listen. How do people like you and Louise do it? Don't you ever get scared? Couldn't the same thing happen to Jen? This Mike Curran who drives the school bus—what do we know about him? Jen rides with him twice a day."

"Oh, darling."

He thought she was going to cry. "I'm crazy," he said. "Nothing will happen to Jen."

"Now I *am* scared. What *do* you know about Mr. Curran? He doesn't drink, does he?"

"No. Curran's a good man. The school board has probably kept pretty close tabs on him."

"Probably," said Nancy. "You don't know."

"I'll make sure. First thing in the morning."

"I'd rather be broken on the rack than have anything—"

"Nothing will happen to Jen. Please don't think about that. Dear Nancy." He went over and kissed her temple, but she made no responsive movement.

She said, "You talk about not having blind faith. But you accept the judgment of strangers about a man who holds our little girl's life in his hands." There was anger in her voice.

"I said I'd check on him in the morning."

"What could you find out? Some old fools on the school board saying Curran's probably reliable."

"Damn it, what do you want me to do?"

"Stop talking like the world's going to fall apart just because there's been one terrible accident. All this talk about faith and no faith and what I'm supposed to be like. Isn't there enough to worry about without imagining dangers?"

"All right," he said. "All right, Nancy." He moved to the window and looked out. The wet road sparkled under the lights.

"I'm sorry she was killed," said Nancy. "It's an awful thing to have happen."

Nothing will happen to Jen, Paul thought, I know that. I know it for an absolute fact. I have faith that nothing will happen to Jen. I have a strong, simple, literal, necessary faith in Michael Curran, the faith of the radish in a certain amount of annual rainfall, the faith of the trapeze artist in the hands of his partner.

Then he saw the headlights as they passed his house. The deadly cars flashed and roared by at what seemed like regular intervals, one deadly car to every few pulse beats, and soon the Marriners' murderous Ford turned in to the driveway.

The Captains Depart

CLOSE YOUR EYES
A SHORT VISIT TO NAPLES
THE FOUR FREEDOMS
IN TIME OF CALAMITY
IRVING
POSITION OF THE SOLDIER
POKER GAME
WHAT DO YOU DO?
PRO AND CON
MAJOR AND MRS. FLETCHER

Close Your Eyes

October, 1943

The corporal came running into the bachelor officers' quarters and stopped in front of a captain and a lieutenant colonel, but he did not come to attention. The captain, Wyatt, had just helped the lieutenant colonel, Norgaard, move into a new room, and they had been having a long talk.

The corporal was out of breath. "Colonel Norgaard, sir," he said, "Lieutenant Walker got killed. Spun into a farmhouse couple of miles up the road and just smashed up everything, the house and everything. There isn't any part of him left. Can't even tell if his engine conked out or what. They were flying instruments up around twenty thousand and first thing the flight leader knew, Lieutenant Walker wasn't answering. Colonel Buchanan went out there in the staff car and he sent me here to pick you up in the recon."

Captain Wyatt stood up. He thought, "I'll have to be the one to tell Marian Walker."

All through the rest of the day, and for some time to come, he remembered that the first definite idea to enter his mind had to do with himself and not with the boy. It was not until they got out to the wreck that he began to think of Larry Walker as a person.

Before the corporal came in, Wyatt had been listening intently to Norgaard. The old man had been off on something of a monologue. Wyatt had asked him if after the present group had completed its operational training, he would like to take command and go with it to one of the theatres.

"How honest do you want me to make this?" Norgaard asked.

Wyatt smiled.

"Well, no," said Norgaard. "I don't want to take this group or any other group. Moreover, I don't care if I stay right here as base operations officer for the duration. I don't care if I never see another kid go up there. I'm not a religious man, but every time I see a child get into one of those goddamned electric chairs I fell like crossing myself. That's all the hell they are, modified electric chairs. Tail ends of a machine gun, not airplanes. I watch some kid running across the apron with his parachute and I want to say to him, 'What's your hurry, son? You got no business up there alone. You ought to be in the drugstore wrapping yourself around a banana split. Put another thousand hours under your belt, and then walk—do not run.'"

"At the same time . . ." Wyatt said.

"Sure. Got to get them out there. Or else. Tell me all about it."

It was plain that the old man wanted to talk. And Wyatt wanted to listen. He had noted that Norgaard had been on the point of sounding off two or three times before this but something had always come up. Wyatt, although he was acting Group intelligence officer and in daily contact with Norgaard, had never heard him talk about anything but airplanes, flying, training methods, or the weather.

There were, to be sure, a number of things about Norgaard that you learned during your first day on the post. You were told about the fourteen thousand hours he had logged, the non-stop record, the bugs he had taken out of engines, the fact that he was referred to as Savvy. You were warned that Savvy Norgaard was hard of hearing. That had happened to many of the old-timers who had flown open-cockpit equipment. Norgaard was forty-nine. "Forty-nine, going on sixty," he said.

Norgaard bit into a bar of chocolate and offered a piece to Wyatt. "I doubt if I'm enough of an Eagle Scout," he said. "These boys need someone who can kid them into thinking they can fly an airplane. As far as I'm concerned, it beats me how they stay up there half the time. At that, they're probably better than the men they're going to fight. But an outfit flying on just guts would drive me out of my head in a month. How in hell do you manage to keep your temper all the time?"

"I used to teach history in a southern California college," Wyatt said. "Coeducational."

"Well, I didn't. I guess I've been around too much. I've seen blue moons twice and plenty of full rainbows—you know, full circles. All the sights. But my bag of luck ran out on Christmas Day, '31, and I've been getting by on nothing but savvy since. Not enough. You got to have luck. I'd jinx these boys over there."

Wyatt found a piece of blitz cloth on the floor and began to rub it idly against his belt buckle. "Christmas Day?" he said.

"Hell of a thing happened. I was climbing in one of those big old transports at eight thousand feet or so—air speed of one-fifty. Ran into a flock of swans. One of them penetrated the leading edge of the left wing. Another dented an engine cowl and two more went through a propeller. Rudder jammed. Portion of bird we took from the wing weighed eleven and a half pounds. About ten hours later I was flying passengers, and a duck smashed through the windshield. Went over the heads of the people and lodged in the baggage compartment."

Wyatt laughed.

"You can't ask for more," said Norgaard. "My bag of luck has been empty for a dozen years. And if you ask me, most of these boys here are just about scraping bottom now. Only, they got no backlog of savvy to draw on. I don't want to take them out someplace where people start throwing at them. Ever see a fighter in full blast at night?"

"Yes," Wyatt said. "Looks like it had a string of blowtorches along the wings."

"Do you know what a fifth of Scotch will get you in some parts of the Aleutians?"

"No."

"Seventy-five to a hundred dollars."

"Lot of money."

Norgaard stood up. "Want to walk me back to the office?" he said.

It was then, before Wyatt had a chance to say yes, that the door had slammed open and the corporal had come in. Norgaard talking like that and then this corporal coming in to say Larry Walker had been killed. And Wyatt had this other bit of business to remember about, the first thing that came into his mind, how he would have to be the one to tell Marian.

For five or six weeks now, Wyatt had been spending a good deal of time with the Walkers. He had first met Larry in a corner of the east hangar a day or two after this new group took over. Larry was watching one of the girl grease monkeys paint "Marian III" on the side of his airplane.

"How come III?" said Wyatt. He had understood that none of these new second lieutenants had been assigned their own combat planes until now.

"Well, the first two were motorcycles," Larry said.

He was a tall kid, unusually large for a fighter pilot. He had stood up when Wyatt addressed him but he scarcely took his eyes off the airplane.

"India's where I think I'd like to fly one of these things," he said. "I think I'd like to give the Taj Mahal a nice, leisurely buzz. I got a cousin flying transports over there and I think I'd like to give that glorified chauffeur a buzz too, but solid. Captain, have you ever taught history? Is your name Wyatt?"

"I have. It is. Do we know each other?"

Walker held out his hand. Wyatt shook it.

"I'll be damned," said Walker. "I thought I recognized you hurrying past the map room this morning. Why, this is wonderful. I once heard you give a lecture in Parkman Hall—Survey 101. I made up my mind I was going to be a historian myself. I almost tried to get them to switch my major. I don't even recall now what stopped me. I guess I remembered I had to be doing something with my hands. Couldn't manage all that research. I have a sister-in-law just got her M.A. in history, though. Calls it her Distinguished Filing Cross. My wife's sister. Say, can you have dinner with us tonight?"

"I'd like to," Wyatt said.

The Walkers were renting the upper floor of a house on the edge of town. They had kitchen privileges downstairs and Marian Walker cooked an excellent dinner. She could not have been more than eighteen—nineteen at most. After all that cooking, there was not a spot on her gingham house dress, and she managed to sit and eat and chat with the men between servings. Wyatt thought she was the prettiest girl he had seen since he left California, and he said so.

"You should see my sister, Palm," she said. "She doesn't live very far from here."

"No, he's right," Larry said. "Palm is the most beautiful girl in the world, but you're the prettiest."

"Can Palm also cook?" Wyatt asked.

"She couldn't boil an egg," Larry said. "But then Marian doesn't know any history. The other day she asked me who fought against us in the War of 1812."

"Wait a minute," she said. "I forgot again. The British, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Wyatt said.

"They impressed seamen," she said. "I bet she'd like you."

"Who?"

"Palm. So far, all the people who're smart enough for her turned out to be about seventy-five years old. What do you think, Larry? When Palm comes here next month she'll have to have somebody to run around with. We'll just bore her to death after the first couple of days. We better hang on to this Captain Wyatt, don't you think?"

"You vamp him," Larry said. "Keep him tied up until Palm gets here. Think you can do it?"

"I can try. He shouldn't be too much trouble."

"A pushover," Wyatt said.

The Walkers made him feel good. He went to the movies with them, and he helped them cut their landlady's lawn, and they played tennis together. Watching Larry on the court, Wyatt could see what Norgaard meant by saying that you could almost tell if a man would make a combat flier by the game of basketball or tennis he played.

Larry played a slashing California game and he could keep it up for six hours at a stretch. When it was over, he would shave and dress at the club—fastidiously, if he was about to meet Marian. She, too, would arrange herself for him, much as she would arrange a bouquet or a Chimayo basket of wonderful fruit. A magazine-cover couple, Wyatt thought, who could only have happened in California.

When Marian referred to Larry's shipping out, her attitude was that of the loyal wife with a husband about to go on a business trip whose results might well enhance his professional standing. "Oh, Larry can take care of himself," she said. "I wish I could be as sure of some of these other boys. Philip, for one. You fellows won't let Phil drink too much, will you? He pretty near passed out last night. I like to've died laughing when he tried to walk that straight line."

Larry's own attitude was about as distinctive in the group as a service cap without a grommet. "When my number comes up," he said, "I'll be there. Won't come up, though, if I can help it. Knock wood."

Two, three, five years ago, Dan Wyatt might have found the Walkers tiresome. There were too many of them at school—lads who looked like Joel McCrea, played first-rate tennis, were momentarily inspired by a good lecture in history or physics but dropped the notion of majoring in it because of the "research" involved. And the girls, the Marians, glowing in their tan, jostling each other at the classroom door within a few seconds of the bell, waiting at the wheel of an old Chevrolet convertible outside the locker room under the grandstand . . . the golden girls . . . give them a C or a D . . . pointless to make them repeat.

Now it was different. The Walkers brought California to this bleak little field. They played tennis, played house, and what the hell. They were swept along by a force too immense for the naked eye, and they had the splendid unconcern not to try to make a rationale of it. At the Walkers', you could float in the current without thought of some future Scylla and Charybdis; there was even the vague promise of a Siren for a week or two, a Siren with an M.A. Captain Wyatt had no intention of having himself lashed to a mast.

"I will probably never get to meet Palm now," Wyatt thought. "And I will have to be the one to tell Marian."

Close Your Eyes

The corporal held open the door of the reconnaissance car while Norgaard and Wyatt got in. It seemed like a long time getting to the farmhouse. They stopped before the driveway to let an ambulance pass. The house was on top of a bad hill, and the car had to take it in second.

Wreckage covered the entire hillside. One of the wings had been thrown clear, but the other still hung from the fuselage. The airplane had cut the house neatly in half and buried its spinner in the floor of the basement. From a distance, the far half of the house looked virtually intact, complete with furniture. There was a bedroom so abruptly exposed that Wyatt had a sense of intruding.

Colonel Buchanan and a man in farmer's clothes came to meet Norgaard and Wyatt. Buchanan held some twisted instrument or other and a piece of charred wire. Oddly enough, there seemed to be no sign of fire anywhere around.

"Can't make out a damned thing," Buchanan said. "I can't imagine what in hell could have happened. You take a look."

"Walker in there?" Wyatt asked.

"No, they carried off the pieces in the ambulance. Wasn't much of him there. Took the old lady in, too, for shock."

"I didn't know anyone else had been hurt," Wyatt said.

"My mother wasn't hurt," the farmer said. "She was dozing off in the chair up there and a window sash fell on her lap, but it didn't hurt her none. She just passed out from the noise or something, that's all. She'll be all right, the doctor said. My mother's been through a lot on this farm. Born here. I come rushing up from the woodshed and the minute I reach her, she opens her eyes. First thing she says, 'Is the boy all right?' She don't get around much any more, but she used to go into town Saturdays, mostly to see these young fellows in their uniforms. I was working on the emery wheel and all of a sudden this big noise. First thing she says, 'Is the boy all right?' "

"Mr. Ellis," Buchanan said, "you come with me after a while and the adjutant will give you those forms and help you fill them out."

"It's Nellis," the farmer said. "Clifford J. Nellis."

"Mr. Nellis, then," Buchanan said. "Captain, I understand Walker has his wife living in town. Will you have the chaplain go over and tell her? I wouldn't want her to get it from some damn-fool neighbor."

"I'll tell her," Wyatt said. "I was a friend of his. I don't think the chaplain could help any."

"Good thing my wife wasn't here," the farmer said. "She's expecting."

Wyatt got into the recon, and the corporal drove it to the Walkers' home. Marian and a small boy named Calvin were playing on the lawn. Calvin had built a tall structure of wooden blocks.

"I made the Washington Yemonumet," Calvin said. "Captain, look at the Washington Yemonumet."

"But this can't be the Washington Monument," said Marian, "because that's got a point on top. Don't you have any pointy blocks? Doesn't look like you do."

Calvin said, "If you close your eyes and say this is the Washington Yemonumet three times, that's what it is. You want to do it, Marian?"

"No, you do it."

Calvin closed his eyes and placed both hands on top of his head.

"This is the Washington Yemonumet with a pointy top," he said five or six times. Then he looked up at Wyatt.

"Sure enough," Wyatt said. "Go and tell the corporal to wait for me. Check the tires, too, will you, Calvin?"

Calvin ran off. Wyatt took Marian into the house and told her.

"Are they sure?" she said.

He nodded.

"Can I look at him?"

"Better not."

"Are they positive he's not alive?"

"Yes," Wyatt said. "Look, Marian, when was your sister supposed to arrive? Couldn't we wire her to come today?"

"I suppose so."

"Will you give me her address?"

Marian took a pocketbook off the top of the mantelpiece and started fumbling in it.

"What am I looking for?" she said. "Here it is, on the back of this envelope. Dan, I can't cry."

"Maybe later."

He stood over her as she sat on the edge of the couch. He began to stroke her hair. She placed a finger in one of the loops of his belt and leaned her head against him for a moment. Then she looked up at him.

"My God," she said.

He went to the telephone and sent a telegram for Palm to come immediately. When he returned, Marian was sitting in the same place on the green couch.

"Dan," she said, "do you mind if I want to be alone? You go away, Dan, and don't let any of the boys come."

"I don't think I ought to go away now. Why don't I go downstairs and you call me if you want anything?"

"I won't want anything. If you'd just go back to the field and ask the boys not to come. I won't do anything foolish, if that's what you're worried about. Maybe if you went away I could cry. Go away, dear, won't you, please."

Wyatt went downstairs and told the old landlady to keep an eye on Marian. The old lady had made the corporal come in. She was feeding him a piece of blueberry pie.

Back at the field, Wyatt looked for Norgaard but could not find him. Then he passed word around for the men not to go near Marian. In the evening, he phoned twice, and both times the landlady said Marian appeared to be all right.

"She took a couple of soft-boiled eggs and some coffee," the landlady said. "It's all I could get her to eat."

Wyatt called again at midnight. The landlady answered again, and she said Palm had arrived. It was noon of the next day before he could drive out to the house, but by then Marian and Palm had packed up and left.

Some weeks later, Captain Wyatt received a letter from California

Marian asked him to send a few of Larry's things. She thanked him for all his kindness and said he'd been a real friend. She said she had not waited for the funeral because it wasn't Larry they were burying anyway. She had been to the morgue, but they would not let her in.

A Short Visit to Naples

May, 1944

Looking north out of his window, Captain Wyatt could see a strip of Mediterranean between the mountains. The water was almost white in the moonlight. The cold African air blew against his face, but he felt comfortable. The small room was set high in the tower of the villa and well heated by a gasoline burner. Wyatt and his roommate, Captain Kirkland, had now spent six days there, and Kirkland had not let any of the evenings pass without observing that the stove burned high-grade aviation gasoline. He seemed to relish this advantage over people back in the States. Kirkland had been overseas almost two years, first with the Air Transport Command in India and now as flight leader in a B-24 group.

Wyatt did not belong to the Group. The general whose aide he was had not intended to spend more than a day at this base, but then the old man had gone down with an attack of dysentery. He was not to be moved for several weeks. Wyatt liked the prospect of a month with very little to do and he moved in with the first congenial officer he met at the mess hall.

The villa turned out to be a comfortable place. The squadron had not had any losses for two months and the men appeared to be fairly well adjusted for the most part. The day after Wyatt arrived they went out on a mission against Naples and ran into no interception and very little flak. They came back in good spirits, ate a lot, and slept late the next morning.

What at first surprised and then nettled Wyatt was that the men showed some reluctance in discussing the mission with him. They talked about it volubly enough among themselves, but two or three of them, without being uncivil, made it sufficiently plain that it was none of the Captain's business. And one of them, an apple-cheeked cherub of a second lieutenant, said, "Flak was nothing at all. Why don't you come along as observer when we go out again tomorrow? It's safe."

"I'll do that," Wyatt said. "Kind of you to ask me."

The boy was not giving himself airs, which made it all the more irritating. Later in the day, he offered Wyatt some candy his mother had sent.

The gasoline burner sputtered, and Wyatt turned around to adjust it. Kirkland came in, carrying a ragged copy of *War and Peace.* He had been reading it for more than a year. One ran into a surprising number of men who lugged copies of *War and Peace* from base to base. Kirkland would crawl in under the mosquito net and arrange his reading light, read a few pages, and go to sleep or start talking about India. That was as far back as he would go; Wyatt did not know where in the States he had come from or what he had done as a civilian.

Tonight Kirkland made no attempt to read. "You've been assigned to me for two missions as an observer," he said. "What's the idea?"

"No idea."

"What do you want to stick your neck out for?"

"I'm not sticking my neck out," Wyatt said. "You don't see me going over Germany."

"All right," Kirkland said. He ducked under his mosquito net and stretched out on the bed. "I thought you were trying to prove something. That's what I was doing when I transferred from A.T.C."

"No, I'm not trying to prove anything."

"Well, I was. Maybe I'd listened to that allergic-to-combat gag once too often. Everybody was pulling that about A.T.C. I'd go back to India tomorrow if I had the chance."

"I've never been there."

"It's no place you'd want to live," Kirkland said. "My girl's in Calcutta, though."

"Red Cross?"

"No."

Kirkland took a picture out of the flight bag under his bed and handed it to Wyatt. It was a large studio portrait of a moderately pretty girl. She might have been Burmese or Malayan; Wyatt wasn't sure. He made a conscious effort not to appear surprised.

Kirkland watched him closely. "She's Burmese," he said.

"Very pretty."

Kirkland put the picture away. Neither of them spoke for a while.

"She's pretty, all right," Wyatt said.

"I'd like to marry her," Kirkland said. He sat up. "Ever spend much time in New York City?"

"Lived there for years."

"How would it be there . . . with a Burmese wife? I mean, how would people react? Are they pretty broadminded about that sort of thing? Could you hold a job, say, if your boss found out about it?"

"Yes, I think so."

"How about socially?"

"There'd be some problems, no doubt. Nothing insurmountable, I don't think. Depends on the kind of friends, of course."

"I'm glad to hear these things," Kirkland said. "It's something I'm going to have to look into. I was thinking maybe in a place like New York I could get away with it. I couldn't in Oklahoma, where I come from. My father is a minister in the Presbyterian Church there, and he'd surely have to give up his position. Took him thirty years to build up that congregation, but he couldn't hold it together a month if I breezed in there with a Burmese wife. She's the girl I want, though. I suppose you think I'm flak-happy."

"No."

"She's as straight a girl as I've ever run into. She escaped from

Burma with several thousand other people and it was hell on those roads to Calcutta, let me tell you. There was an old woman who could hardly walk, but my girl stuck with her clear until the woman died. Just an ordinary-looking woman, and my girl had no way of telling she had some really expensive jewels on her, not until the woman gave them to her just before she died. Well, my girl delivered those jewels to the woman's relatives in Calcutta, and she could have kept them just as easily."

Kirkland looked a little unnecessarily intense about the whole thing, and it occurred to Wyatt that he was about to go on two missions with a fairly emotional pilot. "Were the jewels out of an idol's eye?" he asked.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"I'm not kidding," Kirkland said. "She delivered those jewels to an old man and he didn't even ask her if she had a place to spend the night. What do you think of that?"

"Pretty crummy."

"She didn't have a place to sleep in for a week or more. After that, you don't blame a girl for anything she does, no matter what. But I'll guarantee you, she never had another man after I came into the picture. And she isn't having any now. I trust that girl the way I wouldn't trust another soul on earth, including myself. She's the girl I want to marry and New York is the place I want to live with her. How long do you suppose this war is going to last?"

"Five to twenty-five years."

"What're you talking about?"

"You asked me. That's my guess."

"Another two is *my* limit," Kirkland said.

"Then what? Are you signing a separate peace?"

"No. But I'm not going up in any more flying machines, either."

"That's the ticket," Wyatt said. "Stand on your rights."

Kirkland opened his *War and Peace,* but closed it again and put out the reading light.

"The picture doesn't do her justice," he said. "Good night, Captain."

Wyatt stayed awake long after Kirkland had gone to sleep. He was sorry he had allowed himself to be irritated into going on these two missions. There had not been any German air over Naples for weeks now and the ground defense had been well shot up, but even so— There was nothing to be gained or learned. For one thing, he was not a trained observer; for another, he did not agree with the people who said you never really knew about yourself until you had been in combat.

It seemed to Wyatt that there wasn't much he could or would want to find out about himself in combat. He knew he could be badly frightened. He knew he was no more subject to panic than most people; if anything, less. And he was intensely concerned with staying alive and unwounded.

The jackals started howling in the mountains. Wyatt turned out his own reading lamp and went to sleep.

It was still dark when Kirkland awakened Wyatt. There were two lieutenants in the room, already in flying clothes. One of them was the apple-cheeked boy, who turned out to be Kirkland's navigator. Halprin, the co-pilot, sat in the easy chair and played a French reveille on his harmonica. He was a compact little man with a Prussian haircut and a quick smile. Without taking the harmonica from his mouth, he opened his flight jacket to display the top of a full whiskey bottle.

They went downstairs for the briefing. The target was the Capodichino Airdrome, several miles northeast of Naples. The Group S-2 didn't seem to think there would be any trouble about fighters. His information about the remaining anti-aircraft batteries was precise and reassuring. The weather officer had very little to say. He looked sleepy but interested when Halprin mentioned something he had picked up from a friendly Italian prisoner: if the smoke from Vesuvius blew toward Capri, fair weather was almost certain to follow. The S-2 got up and pin-pointed an insane asylum near the airdrome. The men were not to bomb it, he said. He called out the time, and all the watches were synchronized.

Wyatt was impressed by the functioning of the Group. When the briefing was over and breakfast had been served, the men were picked up by a few well-kept trucks and driven to the dispersal area. The airplanes had already been warmed up. A mess sergeant brought a box of food and a can of fruit juice for each crew, and a candy bar for each man. Kirkland and Halprin completed their check list in a surprisingly short time and took off at 0900 on the nose. They circled the field a number of times while several other groups arrived and fell into formation. Wyatt counted almost a hundred airplanes, mostly B-17's. Ceiling was unlimited and the ground haze slight. Kirkland's B-24 flew in the rear element and crossed the shore line at four thousand feet.

Looking back at Africa, the only sign of human life Wyatt could see was a small fishing village at the foot of a conical mountain. A few reefs and bars had the color of lapis lazuli under the shallow water, but the rest of the Mediterranean was a deep, metallic blue.

As the airplanes cleared land, the crews began to test the guns. One by one, Kirkland's gunners reported in over the interphone. Lehtinen, the top-turret gunner, ordered everyone off the system and told a story about a drunk in an Automat.

Both pilots laughed out loud at the story. Halprin had the wheel, and Kirkland turned back and started to talk, but something on the radio distracted him. The operator had picked up a Viennese waltz, and Kirkland waited until it was over. Then he pushed away his headset and leaned toward Wyatt, who stood on the flight deck.

"How do you like it?" he said. "All the comforts of home."

He seemed entirely relaxed. There was none of the harried intensity he had showed in talking about his girl. Framed by the clean leather of a new helmet, he looked, for the moment, only a shade more plausible than the Warner Brothers airmen, who never failed to draw their share of laughs in the Algiers theatres.

For the moment, too, the formation looked more like a still than a movie. Then the Group leader tipped his right wing and spoiled it.

They passed directly between Sicily and Sardinia, flying, for some reason unknown to Wyatt, at only slightly above one thousand feet.

He had many glimpses of Sardinia through the haze but not a one of Sicily. In what seemed like a very short while, Halprin pointed to a long cloud bank far ahead and said it marked the Italian coast.

The formation started to climb. There was a great deal of chatter on the interphone, and Wyatt removed his headset. The apple-cheeked boy brought some cups of fruit juice to him and the pilots. At ten thousand feet, everyone went on oxygen. At twenty thousand, they were well within sight of the coast.

Capri was a small, rocky island with a number of white buildings scattered along its shores. Every telephone switchboard on it must have been working at capacity. The thin but apparently solid carpet of light clouds over the mainland was broken only by the spiral of smoke that marked Vesuvius.

They crossed the Italian coast at twenty-five thousand feet. In a matter of minutes they were over Naples. Northeast of the city, the clouds showed dozens of convenient openings, a large one directly above the Capodichino Airdrome. From twenty-five thousand, the B-24 element dived down a few hundred feet, and Wyatt could feel the opening of the bomb-bay doors. The bombing run had begun.

Wyatt's eyes strayed from the airdrome to a large yellow building, and he wondered if that was the insane asylum. Off to the left, the B-17's were dropping five-hundred-pounders on the docks and the railroad yards. If the small black bursts below the formation represented flak, he thought, why, how fantastically inaccurate. He could not hear either the firing or the noise of the explosions. Over Halprin's shoulder he caught sight of the bomb clusters falling away from the forward B-24's, but there was nothing to indicate that Kirkland's bombardier had released his. He must have. The bombs cleared horizontally and quivered as they straightened out in their arcs. Some reflex caused Wyatt's right arm to quiver, too.

The navigator called him and pointed to the side window. Wyatt stepped down into the other compartment and looked out. One of the B-17's seemed to be having trouble. It had lost half its altitude and begun to head out to sea. But then he noticed that it had a full squadron around it, so perhaps there was nothing wrong after all. Wyatt had taken his first step back toward the cockpit when a violent explosion knocked him against the radio and down on the floor.

The cabin was filled with smoke and an odor resembling that of garlic. Wyatt sat up and adjusted his mask. His connection with the oxygen system felt intact. He was neither stunned nor hurt. He remembered something he had read about adrenal glands, how drastically their output was stimulated by fear—adrenal, pituitary, thyroid—something like that. He stepped up into the cockpit.

Kirkland had just finished setting the mixture controls and begun to reset the throttle and the propeller pitch. Then he dropped his hands and left Halprin to dive and turn alone. Below and to the left of the pilot's seat, the metal was torn and twisted, and cold air whistled in through a hole.

The interphone was out of order. The navigator and the flight engineer joined Wyatt in the cockpit. By the time the airplane was out over the sea, Halprin had let down far enough for everyone to go off oxygen. At eleven thousand, the wingmen caught up and edged in to give support. The radio operator shouted some unintelligible sentences. All Wyatt could make out was "No interception." The airplane had been hit by flak.

The No. 2 engine began to wind up like a siren. All the eyes in the cockpit turned to the tachometer. When it passed twenty-five hundred, Kirkland signaled and Halprin feathered the prop. With the throttles wide open, there was no immediate loss of speed.

Kirkland had been badly hurt. His entire left thigh and leg were enmeshed in twisted metal. One steel edge had cut through to the thighbone, and nothing that Wyatt or the flight engineer could do would dislodge it. The flight engineer was a young sergeant. As he bent down over the pilot, the slipstream blew Kirkland's blood all over his face and chest. He said, "I'm not a first-aid man. God damn it, Captain, do something." He opened the first-aid kit and handed it to Wyatt.

They tried to move Kirkland, but it could not be done. There was no conceivable way of applying a tourniquet. The big wound reached well above the thigh and most of the blood was trickling from the top of the gash. For a time, Kirkland held the opening together with his own hand. Then Wyatt dressed the wounds with sulphanilamide and held a roll of bandage against the bad place while the flight engineer blocked up the worst part of the torn fuselage.

Kirkland's face was white and rigidly set. But his eyes moved rapidly back and forth along the instrument panel, and he was flying the airplane, although Halprin had the controls. He refused a drink of Halprin's whiskey and closed his eyes while Wyatt injected a syrette of morphia.

"Pain bad?" Wyatt asked.

Kirkland nodded. "Will I be all right?" he asked. "What do you think?"

"Yes, you'll be all right. Stop flying the airplane now. Halprin's got everything. Nobody's seen any fighters. I don't think they'll send out after us."

"I don't think so, either," Kirkland said. His voice was normal, not at all strained. "Plane feels all right to me. How about another one of those injections?"

Wyatt gave him another syrette of morphia. It was the first time in his life that he had ever injected a needle into flesh. The steel penetrated more easily than he expected. He hoped he was not overdosing.

"Everybody all right in back?" Kirkland asked.

"Fine."

"What's the matter with the interphone?"

"The sergeant says your button's jammed and we can't get at it."

"We won't have any trouble if the engines hold up. She's flying right along. Bitch kitty of an airplane."

Wyatt tried to recall everything that had been said at first-aid lectures in basic training and Officer Candidate School. He thought he remembered sleeping through at least one of the sessions in a darkened theatre a long time ago. He wondered if Kirkland had any fractures and if the loss of blood would be too much. The large bandage had soaked through.

It was reassuring to have the large formation ahead and around the airplane. They had a good wind behind them, good enough to stir up foam streaks on the sea below. Toward Sicily, a fishing boat appeared to be standing still.

Kirkland drank a cup of fruit juice. He gave an O.K. signal with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He said to Wyatt, "If anything happens to me and you write my people, don't mention that stuff about the girl. Her being Burmese and all. You . . . Christ, I forgot your name."

"Wyatt."

"O.K., Wyatt."

"Nothing's going to happen to you."

Kirkland closed his eyes.

Halprin leaned over and felt his forehead. "You all right, John?" he asked.

Kirkland nodded.

"Get the plasma," said Halprin to the flight engineer. "Captain, you give him a transfusion."

"Where? Which of the veins? Do *you* know?"

"The big one, I think, near the crook of his arm."

The sergeant brought a container of plasma. It came equipped with the transfusion needle. Wyatt could not get Kirkland's sleeves up much beyond the point where he had injected the morphia. He borrowed a pocket knife from the sergeant and slit the leather and the wool. Kirkland's arm was even whiter than his face.

Wyatt had to insert the needle three times before he hit the heavy vein. Kirkland grew stronger almost perceptibly. The bad part of it was that he also felt more pain. At one point he covered his face. After he took his hand away he vomited a little.

"I'm a slob," he said.

The navigator, the radio man, and the gunners kept coming up to look at him, but Wyatt finally stopped it because Kirkland would want to say something to each of them and strain to make himself heard above the noise of the airplane. At half-hour intervals, Wyatt gave him two more transfusions.

About a hundred miles from the African coast, Kirkland was no longer able to talk. But he continued to give the O.K. signal with his hand. His eyes, when he opened them, were lively, and sometimes he smiled with one side of his face, and once or twice he winked.

When they were within sight of the coast, oil began to gush from the top of the No. 3 engine. Halprin waited a little to see if it would stop. Wyatt also stood up to watch. The oil kept coming until Halprin cut the engine and feathered that prop, too. "Black-hearted son of a bitch," he said.

Kirkland's head had fallen forward and slightly to one side. He had either lost consciousness or died. Wyatt could not tell which. He reinserted the needle and poured in the remainder of the plasma. Perhaps, he thought, I should have given it to him all at once.

They crossed the shore line to the left of the conical mountain. Kirkland was cold by then, dead. The airplane had been losing altitude steadily, but coming over land it still had thirty-four hundred. Halprin circled the home base at slightly better than three thousand.

He made a good landing. But as the wheels touched ground, the airplane swerved sharply to the left, and he had to gun the No. 1 engine to keep on the runway. The left tire had been punctured by flak.

Wyatt did not wait for Kirkland to be moved out of the cockpit. For a time he stood by while the others looked over the damage, but he did not go with Halprin to the briefing. He went to the hospital, where he found his general sitting up in bed. The general told him he had no business going on a mission and that he was under no circumstances to go out on the next one. Wyatt felt grateful for being thus confirmed in a decision he had made between the first and the second transfusions. I must ask the surgeon if I did right in not giving all the blood at once, he thought. I must find out what happened to the B-17 above the Bay of Naples.

The Four Freedoms

February, 1945

The slender tower of the villa was shaped like a Turkish minaret. From the comfortable chairs on the top balcony, Captain Wyatt could, in fact, see a number of Cairo's real mosques in the distance. But more frequently he settled behind the window that opened on the Pyramids. Now, at night, the Great Pyramid was barely visible.

Four staff cars pulled up in the gravel path below and the solemn M.P. lieutenant checked the identity of all the passengers. He had been well briefed about the importance of the general he was guarding. Although the party contained several lesser generals whose faces must have been familiar to him, he took care to examine all the credentials. There were women in the group.

Wyatt walked down the spiral staircase, his old Natal boots incongruous against the lavish carpet. Just before he got to the second floor, he met the servant who had instructions to call him when the party arrived. The man stood aside and bowed slightly as Wyatt passed. He had apparently been trained to stand with downcast eyes in the presence of his superiors; all the servants in the villa, and there were at least a dozen, did that. They looked you in the eye only when receiving an order. They were all Egyptian and moved about quietly in their loose liveries and remembered, after being told once, the amount of sugar you took in your coffee. Their master, also Egyptian, was away in England, but the arrangements he had made for the entertainment of Wyatt's general could hardly have been more elaborate.

"Keep your eyes peeled and let me know if you come across Aladdin's lamp in one of these rooms," the General had said at the end of the first day.

Wyatt opened an immense inlaid door and went into the General's bedroom. The reading light was on, but the General had gone to sleep. He had removed only his tie and was lying behind the mosquito net in his suntans. The net had been installed for the General. It opened and closed by zipper, and Wyatt found this refinement more impressive, somehow, than the heavy gold plate used at dinner or the half acre of greenhouses or the wine cellar whose treasures the General declared to be beyond comparison.

Sleeping, the General looked fifty-eight, though he was ten years younger. Twenty of those years had been spent in the Army Air Forces. His large, dark face was deeply lined, sagging and loose in sleep; his breathing, obstructed and irregular. He groaned as Wyatt said "Sir . . . General" a number of times. Then he sat up.

"Nine o'clock, sir," Wyatt said. "You asked to be waked when those people got here."

"What people?"

"That USO troupe you missed in Algiers."

"I remember," the General said. "Can you fill me in on them?"

"They made a big hit in town last night. I wasn't there, but General Crane said they were very good. He's downstairs with them now, I think. They've got a comedian and a juggler and a couple of young movie actresses."

"Are they going to put on a show downstairs?"

"If you like. I understood you just wanted to say hello."

"Well, now that you got me wide awake, I'll go down. The juggler might be worth seeing."

Back in the States, one of Wyatt's chores had been to set up showings of current films at the General's home. The picture companies, who often availed themselves of Air Forces equipment, had always been glad to oblige. The General liked horse operas, murder mysteries, and Popeye cartoons, in that order, and usually overruled his wife, who preferred long pictures in which people grew old.

The General opened the mosquito net and put his feet on the floor. "Dan," he said, "did you read that magazine article about me?"

"Yes, sir."

"What'd you think of it?"

"I thought it was a magazine article about a general."

The General picked a uniform out of the closet. "What do you suppose he meant by calling me a 'bloodless expert in the bloody mathematics of air warfare'?"

"He was turning a phrase," Wyatt said.

"He said I was cold and ruthless. He said I had the instincts of a puma closing for the kill. Compared me to Jack Dempsey at Toledo."

"I doubt if he was more than two years old when that fight was held."

"You know him, do you?"

"I've seen him around," Wyatt said.

"Is he still accredited to us?"

"No, sir."

"I don't want him back here," the General said. "I don't give a hoot in hell where the article was cleared, but I want it understood that the son of a bitch stays out of my command. Pass that on." He adjusted his necktie in front of the full-length mirror.

"And this picture he had of me glaring into the camera," he went on. "If I got killed and buried tomorrow and they dug me up next year, I'd look better than that. All you needed to round out the case history of a homicidal maniac was that god-damned photograph. Where in Christ's name did he get this 'cold, ruthless' baloney from, do you suppose?"

"I think he was referring to Shamrock."

Shamrock had been the code word for an operation early in the war. The General had sent some P-40 squadrons to an advance field within easy fighter range of the Italian Air Force, the mission being to damage as much enemy shipping and as many enemy aircraft as possible. The squadrons were eager, target-hungry, and unaware that they were being expended. They sank a few freighters and a troopship and brought down three times their own number of airplanes before the General considered withdrawing them. He decided against it. His trade balance was already much better than even. With replacements coming through, he viewed all further successes as pure gravy.

The squadrons sank another ship, brought down some more bombers, and then they were wiped out in a single afternoon. The operation had completely disrupted the forward air echelons of the enemy and prevented supplies and ground troops from being landed in a contested area. It was regarded as the turning point of an important campaign, and the survivors of the group to which the squadrons had belonged received a Presidential citation.

"What the hell does this joker know about Shamrock?" the General said. "I bet he was covering ball games when that show was on. Jack Dempsey at Toledo. Just because a sportswriter wants to make a dollar writing about heroes, my seventy-nine-year-old mother buys a magazine off the newsstand only to read that her son is a puma, closing for the kill. Keep him out of my command is all I can say."

The General was dressed. He looked at Wyatt, who had on a newly pressed uniform.

"Mighty sharp," he said. "Mighty sharp, Dan. What are these actresses called? I can't ever remember names when people are introduced."

"Their studios call them April Starr and Gail Fiske."

"Any relation to Minnie Maddern Fiske, do you suppose?"

"Can't say, sir."

"Well now, that's just the kind of thing an aide ought to know. Sometimes I wonder what I keep you around for."

He's feeling good again, Wyatt thought. "Well now, sir," he ached to say, "you know quite well what you keep me around for. You've been persuaded that I'm a historian of some attainments and you think it would be little short of delicious if I were to write a full-length, discreet biography of you after the war. You think I keep a journal of all your sayings and doings, and you'd like to see them sifted out and done up in a handsome volume at, say, three and a half bucks a throw. All about the boy who stuck with the Air Corps, got kicked around by the foot-army brass, took his beating, and emerged as one of the great tacticians of the war. Come right down to it, that wouldn't be so very much further from the truth than most military history, but I believe I'll pass up the chance all the same. I believe I'll just serve my time and get out, sir."

Wyatt found it irksome that a man, any man, whatever his age and station in life, could treat him with affectionate condescension, and he did not, though he tried to, find solace in the fact that a fairly large number of West Point colonels would have been pleased to change places with him.

The General will be descending the great staircase soon, Wyatt thought, in full consciousness of his rôle as the most important man in a room filled with rank. He will slap his current favorite, the new young General Jack Crane, on the shoulder, and he will play wicked uncle to April Starr and Gail Fiske. If he likes the comedian and the juggler, he will ask them if they have any relatives in the Air Forces or what they thought of the food at some A.T.C. base. With the juggler and the comedian, he'll be Harun-al-Rashid, incognito on the streets of Bagdad, sounding out public opinion. He might confound them by asking how long they thought the war would last and why.

Like most, though by no means all, other soldiers, the General was obsessed by that question. And well he might be, thought Wyatt, still in a bilious strain. He'll never again attain a fraction of the power he wields. A coal miner's son and still drawing only moderate pay, the chief was living as only the wealthiest men in the history of the world had lived. In England he had stopped at the greatest of feudal castles, elsewhere in a series of royal suites, and here among such Byzantine splendors as gold cups on the table and zippers on the mosquito net. He had at his disposal any means of transport or communication known to man. Presents and honors came to him from everywhere. And large formations of bombers went on critical missions, at tree-top level, against targets selected by him.

There was this: As generals went, the chief was good. He had done perhaps as much as any single man to bring the war and his own prosperity to an end. But he was having the time of his life, and deep in his heart, whether he knew it or not, he loved this war. He loved the change of scene and the heightened awareness and he loved being important.

And I'm the one to talk, Wyatt thought, I, who will accompany him as he makes his entry downstairs, knowing deep in *my* heart that all the little buck generals will be nice to me because they think I'm close to him, and how I shall lap it up.

That was about what happened. The General and Wyatt found thirty or more people in the reception room, five of them generals. Jack Crane immediately introduced Wyatt to the two actresses, who were very young and very beautiful, and selected as contrasts, no doubt, being respectively blonde and brunette. Crane even mumbled something about Wyatt's being a good man to know, and that made Miss Fiske, who could not have learned much about the relative ranks of Army officers, reasonably attentive. Her manner, indeed, came to verge on the cuddlesome and she whispered into Wyatt's ear that one of the British generals looked like C. Aubrey Smith, the actor. And the servants brought Wyatt a deep-red brandy he had expressed a preference for some days ago. The evening began to shape up agreeably.

At the General's request, the juggler and the comedian went through their routines. Wyatt enjoyed them both. Then the guests formed in loose groups, mostly around the General and the two actresses. Wyatt found himself attracted by Gail Fiske, who, while perhaps less dazzling than the blond Miss Starr, more nearly realized the Elizabethan ideal—there is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion. Gail Fiske had a very large mouth, made up to look sullen but usually parted in a gay, unforced smile. She could not have been more than twenty-two, and she was eager and giddy and altogether the belle of the prom.

Unfortunately, General Crane and a wing commander from the R.A.F. and an Australian colonel stayed in the running throughout. None of them would leave for any longer than it took to fetch her something from the buffet. Wyatt gave up and got himself a small sandwich, too, and wandered out into the large conservatory.

Hidden behind a cluster of leafy vines in the far corner, someone was playing a piano. An odd place for the instrument. Wyatt had never noticed it there. He walked along the marble path to a point where he had a clear view of the player. She was a small girl, in a pale-blue dress, and she had not heard him come over. He sat down on a bamboo bench.

She was playing the "Moonlight Sonata." The too-familiar piece sounded miraculously fresh and lovely. He had the illusion of listening to it for the first time and in the midst of a green and friendly jungle. Wyatt had been warmed by the brandy and excited by Gail Fiske, and now this piano in the jungle stirred him as deeply, perhaps, as music ever had.

When the girl finished playing, she bent down and drew a bottle of champagne from an ice bucket at her feet. She poured herself a drink and sipped it. Then she played some Debussy and two short pieces that Wyatt had never heard. She paused to drink again, and caught sight of him.

"Don't stop," he said.

"I wasn't going to play any more."

She was not pretty. She had a tiny face, enormous eyes, and a sharp, prominent nose. She smiled without parting her lips. They had signed her for this tour, she told Wyatt, ostensibly to act as accompanist for April Starr, who sang, but actually to chaperone the two girls. She talked well, with a Maine accent, and Wyatt liked her a lot. Her name was Ruth Hoffman.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I ought to be inside right now, looking after my charges. But they're probably being taken care of well enough. I thought I'd come out here and celebrate my thirty-fourth birthday with this bottle of champagne. Technically, I'm a week late, but they had nothing of interest to drink in Oran."

She may or may not have been a little tight.

Wyatt said, "Won't you play some more?"

"No. I just wanted to fool around with a good piano, for a change."

"You weren't fooling."

"I suppose not."

"You're a concert pianist, aren't you?"

"No," she said. "I'm an accompanist and chaperone. Where I come from, you've got to lay two thousand dollars on the line to be a concert pianist."

"Where is that?"

"The United States."

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Well, if you want to get engagements in the sticks, you must be able to produce some New York notices. And if you want to get yourself properly launched with a New York concert, you better have two thousand dollars to put up. I never did. I used to be pretty bitter about that."

"I should think you'd still be."

"No," Ruth Hoffman said, "not any more. Not for years now. Although I must confess, when I first walked through this villa, I thought there is something very wrong, very bad about wealth heaped up on such a scale. Who owns this place?"

"Some Egyptian."

"Maybe that makes it worse. Or does it? I don't know. What a country. A villa like this and then, a few hundred yards away, all the filth and horror of the world."

"Have you ever walked a few blocks east or west of Fifth Avenue?"

"It's not the same thing," she said. "This morning, on the Mena Road, our driver almost ran over a little girl lying in the gutter. He got out to see what was wrong and the child had been sleeping there, just sleeping. She sat up and one of her eyes was nothing but a running sore. And all she had on was a frayed old gunnysack with a hole in it. Why am I telling you all this? I know. It's because you liked my playing so much, or said you did. Champagne, too. I've been sitting out here for an hour being righteously wrathful and drinking this excellent champagne. Won't you have some? They seem to have quantities of it inside. That general, the important one, is stopping here, I believe."

"I'm his aide."

"Oh. I heard about him in Algiers. He's something of a legend, isn't he?"

"Yes," Wyatt said.

"But you're not very fond of him, are you?"

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you said yes."

"No, I'm not very fond of him." Wyatt had no wish to lose his job, but this girl had been talking openly and he fell in with it.

"Why do people think he's so good?" she asked.

"He *is* good. When he needs fifty airplanes to do a job, he demands a hundred, receives forty, and the job gets done. He's a rough customer, no fooling. That part of the legend is pretty well founded."

"But you're not very fond of him, are you?"

"No, not very," Wyatt said. "He likes war. I don't. Though it isn't as simple as that, of course. Still, people in the abstract or people he doesn't know really well are even less important to him than to most of us. That child you saw on the Mena Road would not have affected him any more than the glimpse of a dead rabbit. She was a foreigner, for one thing. And he doesn't like foreigners, whether they're wogs, nips, krauts, frogs, limeys, greasers, or whatever. Americans are all right, just so they don't go around thinking that battleships and carriers are more important than land-based aviation."

"He sounds awful."

"He isn't. I'm sorry if I'm giving you the impression that he's some sort of moral idiot. He has all kinds of very strong loyalties. And he knows as much about the military uses of the airplane as probably any man alive. I don't know where the Air Forces would be without a few dozen like him. I *do* know where we'd all be without the Air Forces."

"Are you going to keep working for him after the war?"

Wyatt laughed. "No," he said. "I don't think I'll work for anybody if I can help it. I don't like to work directly under people. Do you?"

"I don't mind," she said. "I'm enjoying the job I have now. The girls are both fine kids and a lot of fun to be with. If I can only keep them from getting pregnant."

"Is there a likelihood?"

"Not a likelihood, I hope. A possibility, yes. They're both at the age where they neck around a good deal and, needless to say, their opportunities are ample. With all the chichi, they're two really innocent girls and take quite some looking after. We've had only one major mishap. Before we left England, Gail got herself tangled up in a weekend affair with a baby lieutenant and we had a bit of a crisis over that. Luckily, he was not a very intelligent or aggressive boy and the thing died a natural death."

"Are you sure it was natural?"

"Oh, yes."

Wyatt remembered Gail Fiske and he felt intensely jealous of the lieutenant in England. He drank a glass of Ruth Hoffman's champagne.

She ran off a few delicate arpeggios with her left hand. "You mustn't waste sympathy on the lieutenant," she said. "He took it quite well. It wasn't as though Gail had forsaken him in the Aleutians or somewhere. There are lots of girls in England and I think he'd noticed that."

"And Miss Fiske?"

"Someone will come along and kiss her and make it good. If he hasn't already. I'm not sure she tells me everything. My, this champagne is stronger than I thought. I'm having a highly successful birthday party, after all. You're a great help, Captain."

It occurred to Wyatt that he could, with a little effort, take her upstairs, and he considered it. She was by all odds the most congenial girl he had met overseas and her hands on the keyboard were delightful to watch.

"We've spent two whole days in Cairo now," she said, "and we haven't been out to see the Pyramids yet. Maybe I'll go tomorrow."

That was a frankly transparent lead, but before Wyatt had a chance to respond, General Crane came out from the reception room.

"There you are," Crane said. "I hope I'm not intruding. Dan, do you happen to know what the four freedoms are? The General asked me and I couldn't think of more than two to save my life. He said you'd know. Freedom of speech, of worship, and what else?"

"From fear and from want," Wyatt said.

"That's right. I couldn't remember those two to save my life. Well, the chief didn't know them himself. Thanks, Dan. That's the old staff work, boy."

He went away as fast as he had come.

"You mean they didn't know?" she asked.

"You look startled."

"Didn't they, really?"

"I guess not," Wyatt said.

"My God."

"Crane has led about twenty missions across Germany, five over Ploeşti, and he walked back from one of them. I don't think he's had much chance to think about any freedoms."

"I wouldn't have believed it," she said.

Why should she be so appalled, Wyatt wondered. Were there people like her, intelligent and obviously well informed, who expected generals to remember details of the President's manifestoes? Yes, there must be a great many. But how could this girl, so—what's the word?—so disenchanted, how could she presume that freedoms and such had anything to do with the conduct of this or any other war?

And yet, he thought, there was a time when I might have been appalled myself.

From fear and from want. That child on the Mena Road had not grown up under German or Italian or Japanese rule. How many like her were there in India or in Puerto Rico? Did she have it any better than the children of Kiev or of Tripoli? Did she have it any better than a small Jewish girl in Warsaw?

Yes, she had it better than a small Jewish girl in Warsaw. All right, then, she had it better. But don't expect young Crane to think about that. Don't go cluttering up his excellent reflexes with scruples, qualifications. You do that and he'll start thinking of himself as a murderer. And "if once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing, and from robbing he next comes to drinking and Sabbath breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination." And you wouldn't want young Crane to procrastinate, would you? Not over Ploeşti, you wouldn't.

Now, just you file away my copy of the four freedoms, Miss Hoffman, he thought, down in the lower right-hand drawer, in the same folder with the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and Gail Fiske's fan-magazine interviews. Thank you.

And one thing more. Don't look at me with those enormous eyes. I didn't start this war. I just happened to get involved in it, like a number of other people, and now I'm doing my job or playing the game or what the hell ever you want to call it. This is no time to start me thinking about little children and large ideas, Ma'am. This is no time to start me thinking about anything at all. Right now my idea is to live through the war and scurry back where I came from. After that, we'll see.

Wyatt did all this heavy thinking in a very few minutes and on two glasses of champagne. Ruth Hoffman had drunk one more herself. She ran off another arpeggio and this time she missed a note. She was tight enough to sway a little.

What a really nice girl, Wyatt thought, a nice, complicated, intelligent girl, thin in the chest. What enormous, expectant eyes. She was waiting for him to say yes, he would be glad to show her the Pyramids.

Then she stopped waiting and said, "We'd better go in. I ought to be looking after my girls."

They walked back to the reception room. The largest of the groups had formed around the General. April Starr was coming down the stairs and Ruth Hoffman joined her. Gail Fiske had remained in the same corner of the room, with only the Australian colonel and the wing commander from the R.A.F. now paying court. She still looked beautiful and, in the light of what Ruth Hoffman had said about the baby lieutenant, a good deal more accessible. Wyatt asked her if she would like to drive out in the morning and see the Pyramids, but she had already promised to go with General Crane.

In Time of Calamity

January, 1944

Captain Wyatt had not been so tired since his days in basic training. He had flown nearly four thousand miles from Teheran to this air base in northeastern Nigeria. The name of the place was a kind of song, a chant—no, a carol, a madrigal. That's what it was—Maiduguri.

Now that the main flow of traffic had shifted to North Africa, the only passenger equipment they were flying through here were C-47's with bucket seats, and few people had ever contrived to sleep in those. Between Teheran and this Maiduguri, Wyatt had not slept more than thirty minutes at a stretch. And now he was about to take off for Accra, on the Gold Coast.

He sprawled in a wicker chair on the porch of the operations office. A few feet from him, a gigantic Negro was sweeping the sand deposited there by the prop wash of an old Hurricane. Wyatt had been sure that no American Negro could conceivably be so black, but this one was humming the tune of "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else but Me."

"When does it start getting dark here?" Wyatt asked. The Negro stopped sweeping and looked at Wyatt uncomprehendingly.

"He can't understand you," said someone behind Wyatt. "Some of these wogs go for years around here without picking up a word. It'll start getting dark just about the time we take off. I'm your pilot. My name is Bartholomew."

He was a first lieutenant, a couple of years older than most of the kid pilots Wyatt had drawn on this long trip.

"They look pretty, some of them, don't they?" said Lieutenant Bartholomew. "Right out of a fresh new copy of *National Geographic.*

This one looks as if Joe Louis wouldn't last a round with him, but he doesn't have the strength of the smallest G.I. on the post. It's their diet or something."

The Negro stood there, staring at them.

"Imshi," Bartholomew said. "Blow. Police up the area. Imshi."

The Negro resumed sweeping.

Bartholomew settled into the wicker chair opposite Wyatt's. "Captain, may I ask if you're a courier?" he said. "I saw your priority rating on the manifest."

"No," said Wyatt. "General's aide."

"Trade school?" He meant West Point.

"No, O.C.S. Just a duration-plus-six man, I hope. I've been in a year and a half." Wyatt liked people to know that in a comparatively short time he had gone from private to captain.

"Hell, I've been in grade longer than that. You can tell your general about it. Twenty-two months in grade as a first, and averaging over a hundred hours a month in these trucks. There was one month I flew a hundred and seventy, mostly between Dakar and Marrakech—all Sahara, with three dependable check points if and when you're lucky enough to see them."

"Pretty rough," Wyatt said, "but out of my chief's jurisdiction."

"How do you get to be an aide? Sounds like a clean way to make a living. What'd you do in civilian life?"

"I was an assistant professor of history. And you?"

"I'd just finished my first year at Harvard Law. Don't ask me why. I don't want to be a lawyer. I don't know what I want to be. It's a cinch I will have had my bellyful of aviating when this is over. It must be nice for you with a profession to go back to. All this should be right up your alley in a way. History in the making. I notice you're coming from Teheran. That must have been something."

"Mmm," Wyatt said. "All the major generals and vice admirals had been left behind at Cairo. Nothing but issimos of one kind or another. And the immediate family. Madame Chiang, Sarah Churchill, Major Boettiger, Colonel Elliott, Sergeant Hopkins."

"What was Stalin like?" It was the first question everyone asked.

"I don't know. He smiled and chuckled a great deal and froze up only when there were cameras around. I didn't get to sit in on anything of even secondary importance. I shook hands with him once at the reception. Very firm. I imagine he got most of the things he wanted. The interpreters said he was a fast man with a quip."

"I should think it must have been fascinating up there," Bartholomew said.

"Not quite so fascinating as some books I've read about the Congress of Vienna." Wyatt was not being facetious, not altogether. In five days, he and his general had flown over twelve thousand miles to Teheran and then, as now, he had been too tired to be truly alert about the people and objects around him.

Undoubtedly, if he had been fresh and rested, even the manipulated symbolism of the Conference would have had its points of interest. In spite of the fact that the real decisions had probably all been made weeks and months before, to a fresh palate that succulent sword ceremony might have been tempting indeed. Joseph Dzugashvili kissing the lavishly wrought weapon sent by the Defender of the Faith and presented by the man who was not proposing to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. Everyone had looked pleased. Remarks, to be sure, had been passed about the permanent manner in which the Russians had recently taken over the airfield at Teheran, but those had been drowned out in the all-around good fellowship.

It occurred to Wyatt that very possibly he had been the only professional historian present at Teheran. Mr. Churchill and Marshal Stalin had, of course, written with some abandon about history, but with them it had been more of a sideline. Too, they had not always been fortunate in their selection of subjects; Mr. Churchill had written about Marlborough with strong family feeling, and Marshal Stalin about Trotsky, who had had that sad accident in Mexico. Sideline or not, there was no denying that either Mr. Churchill or the Marshal would have made his mark in the history department of any Midwestern college. When and if Wyatt returned to his own college he would undoubtedly be expected to do a paper on Teheran. Mostly if. I must get some sleep in Accra, he thought.

A broad-shouldered second lieutenant came out on the porch. He had all the distinctive trophies of the Air Transport Command pilot—the boots from Natal, the brilliantly embroidered shoulder patch from Karachi, the silver bracelet from Calcutta, and, on his flight jacket, the Persian lettering done, as a rule, in Abadan.

"Lieutenant Lahm, my co-pilot," Bartholomew said. "Sixteen months in grade, but happy as the day is long. What do you know, Texas? Anything more come in on weather?"

"Only what you know. Operations says it's up to us. Are we going to take the chance?"

"I think so. It doesn't look bad."

"I'd just as soon," Lahm said. "Though I still can't understand what you see in her. Besides everything else, she's knocked up. That's what she's going back to the States for, to get an abortion. She told me. Two short snorts of rum and she told me. Lay ten to one we won't find her there any more."

"I'll take that," Bartholomew said. "Now stop blackening her character and go to hell, son. The Captain here and I are talking."

"He's pulling rank," said Lahm to Wyatt. "So help me, if one more guy pulls rank on me today, I'll let go with a forty-five. I don't care if he's a colonel or what."

"What did that colonel say anyhow?" Bartholomew asked. "It looked as if he was reading the riot act to you back there."

"So help me, I'll let go with a forty-five," Lahm said. "All I did was slap this wog around some, and the jerk (j.g.) threatens to put it in my 201 file. I don't know. Where do those wogs come off? They're no better than our Texas niggers. Why can't I haul off on him if he stands there grinning at me?"

"My buddy," said Bartholomew. "My chum. He looks mean and rough, but underneath that cold exterior there beats no heart at all. The next time he steps out of line, I'm going to put in for another co-pilot."

"Silver bars among the gold," Lahm said. "Man, how they do shine. Why don't you have them wired for neon lights, lieutenant?"

"Don't mind us," Bartholomew said to Wyatt. "This has been going on for a year. He's really a pretty good co-pilot. Faithful as the day is long. Right now he's a little sore because there is no nurse along with our load of patients. All we carry is a medical sergeant to look after them. You and that sergeant will be the only sane people in the back, I guess. Matter of fact, you better ride up front in the navigator's seat. It's not very comfortable, but you don't want to spend the night with those mental cases."

"There are some honeys along on this one," Lahm said. "All enlisted men except one major who thinks he's invented a machine gun without recoil. He says it all came to him in a vision about the Avenging Angel. Right now he's holding a revival meeting in the Red Cross room with a couple of the nigger boys. Man, I never thought I'd live to see the day when I'd be chauffeuring nigger boys around Africa.

"There's a waist gunner from the Ninth with them," Bartholomew said. "He's a nice kid. I think he'll come around after a while. He doesn't shake like some of them. It's a wonder somebody doesn't invent a vaccine against that stuff. Combat fatigue, I mean. Captain, did much of the discussion at Teheran revolve about the subject of combat fatigue? . . . The Captain here has just come from Teheran."

"Sure enough?" Lahm said. "What was Stalin like?"

Wyatt had great trouble keeping his eyes open. Ordinarily he would have been elated at finding so articulate a travel companion as Bartholomew, but now his mind, though active, refused to focus. His mind, he thought, had been reeling off too much film. What would the shots be like after being developed and fitted into continuity? A lot of things would have to be fitted in, like buzzing the Dead Sea at twelve hundred feet below sea level, and being forced down near the Euphrates, of all rivers, and being stepped on by a camel in Suez, a camel with a red tail-light. What attractive stories for one's declining years. The little girls in Survey II will be delighted to hear about flying over the site of Carthage and the shambles of Tobruk harbor and all that Mediterranean, just as blue as advertised. Tell them about the attendant at the Gezira Club pool in Cairo. "Captain," he'd said, "they will tell you there were enlisted men swimming in this pool yesterday, but I assure you the water has been changed."

Spin them a few yarns. History was a chain of hallowed anecdotes. History was a somewhat fraudulent but on the whole innocuous metonymy for belles-lettres, anyway.

Yes, old Professor Wyatt certainly has his crotchets, but did you ever hear him tell about the time a Focke-Wulf took a pass at a transport he was flying over the Bay of Biscay? Get him started on that. This transport was a converted B-24, and the German pilot thought he was attacking a bomber, so he never came back for another pass. Tore off a big chunk of the tail assembly, though. You wouldn't think it, to look at old Wyatt hobbling across the campus, old Wyatt with his nose wedged in a book.

He fell asleep. When a soldier woke him, he was conscious that his mouth had been open. The two pilots had left.

"You're ready to pull out, sir," the soldier said. He pointed to the C-47 on the apron.

The plane was all loaded and being revved up when Wyatt got in. Most of the patients in the bucket seats had their safety belts fastened. Their eyes followed Wyatt as he made his way across the baggage to the cockpit. They looked like any other group of soldiers. There must have been twenty of them lining the cabin. A major, undoubtedly the one who thought he had invented the machine gun without recoil, was being assisted with his straps. He looked old for a major.

Up front, the radio operator smiled pleasantly at Wyatt, who wondered if the men were taking him for one of the patients. The navigator's chair was of steel, small, but Wyatt put his head on the table and fell asleep again immediately. The last thing he remembered was the ground-crew man dragging the chocks away.

It was almost dark when he opened his eyes. There was a sergeant standing in the narrow passage between him and the radio operator, not the medical sergeant in charge but one of the patients, an aerial gunner.

"Do you mind if I stay here awhile, sir?" the gunner asked. He was blond, but his features looked Indian in the poor light. "I won't interfere with your work."

"I'm not working," Wyatt said. "Just flying deadhead. I don't think they ever carry navigators on this run. Do you want to sit down?"

"No, thanks. I don't mind standing. Just so I don't have to hang around those goons back there. I'm supposed to be crazy myself. I mean, I *am* crazy. Not just bucking for section eight, either. I'm as crazy as any of them. Only difference is, I know it."

"You'll be all right," Wyatt said. "You'll get a good long rest in the States. They've got some pretty decent deals now with these redistribution centers."

"They would have kept me in that hospital for the duration if I wasn't driving the rest of the ward crazy. I sung a song all the time that was driving them crazy. It starts like this:

A poor aviator lay dying
At the close of a bright summer day,
His comrades was gathered around him
To carry the fragments away.

"Do you want to hear the rest of it?" The gunner had a good voice. He braced himself against the heater and leaned over Wyatt. The airplane was sloughing in the turbulence.

"Yes," Wyatt said.

He spit out a valve and a gasket,
And stirred in the sump where he lay,
And then to his wondering comrades
These parting words he did say:

"Take the manifold out of my larynx,
And the cylinders out of my brain,
Take the piston rods out of my kidneys,
And assemble the engine again."

"Drove the other guys crazy," the gunner said. "Got me out of there, though. I'll never be right myself, but I figure I might as well be crazy at home, where you don't get pushed around near so bad."

"You'll be all right."

"The minute I went crazy, I could tell. All through that mission I was going good, like we were having a dry run. Two airplanes blew up in front of me so close I could have touched them. Didn't bother me. But when I got down and looked at the flak holes on my own ship, hundreds of them, I passed out and I never been right since. I'm not crazy like some of those bastards back in the cabin, though. I talk sense. You can understand everything I say, can't you?"

"I can understand you," Wyatt said. "There's nothing wrong with anything you say."

Wyatt felt stiff. He stood up and stretched. He offered his seat again to the gunner, and this time the boy took it. The turbulence was really bad. Wyatt stepped up to the cockpit and looked at the panel. The altimeter stood at twelve thousand.

"Kind of a dust storm below," Bartholomew said. "But I don't think we'll have to go any higher than this. I wouldn't like to. This truck isn't geared up for passengers. No oxygen system in the back. I see that gunner has been bending your ear. Has he sung for you yet? You never did tell me what they decided about combat fatigue at Teheran."

"They annulled it," Wyatt said. "Combat fatigue must go."

"Son of a bitch," Bartholomew said.

"Who?"

"I don't know who. Everybody. Nobody."

That was about it, Wyatt thought. This Bartholomew was bright. He had what, in the introductory lecture to Survey II, you called historical perspective. You could not blame the men in power because, in truth, they had no power. Think about it long enough and you couldn't pin a thing on any of them. You could hate one or the other, for a time. You could hate Neville Chamberlain or Francisco Franco or the Japanese who dipped a bayonet into your friend's throat or the corporal who put you on latrine duty three times out of turn. You could hate them all in succession but not in historical perspective. What were you going to do with your hatred then, all this foul, weary hatred in the marrow of your bones? Wait until after the war? Wait until the whining about Great Betrayals became chic again?

"Go back and see if the load's all right," said Bartholomew to Lahm. "Feels as if something had shifted. Feels tail-heavy, doesn't it? And tell that gunner to go back, too. We can't have him up here. You never know about those boys."

Staying up front might well have been the gunner's way of showing he did not belong with the patients; Wyatt remained in the cockpit while Lahm talked to the boy. Then he followed them back into the cabin.

The load had not shifted, but there was a group of seven or eight men in the tail. Two of them were kneeling. As Wyatt and Lahm approached them, the old major, who had been reading aloud from a small book, turned around.

"Gentlemen," he said, "would you care to join our little meeting? I am about to read the prayer 'In Time of Calamity.'"

"I'm sorry, Major," said Lahm. "You'll have to break it up back here and return to your seats. The airplane is tail-heavy."

"Very good, Lieutenant. You're in command here, Lieutenant. I will abide by your decision. Will you permit me to finish? This is a short prayer."

Without waiting for Lahm's answer, the major turned his flashlight on the little book and began reading, "'O God, merciful and compassionate, who art ever ready to hear the prayers of those who put their trust in Thee, graciously hearken to us who call upon Thee, and grant us Thy help in this our need, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.' Go back to your seats at once. Hup, two, three, four. Lieutenant, I thank you."

The major marched back to his seat. He managed to look stiff even as he walked across the baggage. The men followed him. One of them, a corporal, was crying.

"What's ailing him?" Lahm asked.

"Anxiety neurosis," said the medical sergeant. "He's the kind that worries. Thinks he knows all about airplanes. A while ago he insisted we were up at twenty thousand feet because his lighter wouldn't work. Said there wasn't enough oxygen, and started choking and spitting all over the place. The meeting made him forget about it."

"We're at twelve thousand," Lahm said. "That's no altitude to make anybody choke."

"I know," the sergeant said, "but these men don't."

"Keep them in their seats, that's all. We got an airplane to fly."

"Yes, sir."

Lahm went back to the cockpit.

"Don't you usually carry a nurse when you're evacuating these men?" Wyatt asked.

"Usually, yes. They're always a big help. The men are not so apt to get violent with a nurse around. They try to make more of an impression. Even having an officer here helps. Trouble is, they know that major is sick, too."

"Would it help if I stayed back here?"

"I think so."

Wyatt found himself a seat on the barracks bag that felt softest. He tried to keep from going to sleep, but his eyelids kept closing as if something, some heavy, furred object, were pressing down on them.

The corporal began to sob. He was near enough for Wyatt to touch his knee.

"What's wrong, Corporal?"

"My lighter won't work," the man said. "There isn't enough oxygen up here. I'm choking." He tore the button off his collar.

Wyatt took out his own lighter. It wouldn't hurt to try, he thought. The corporal was partly right; lighters don't work well at twelve thousand, but if you blew on them, it helped sometimes.

He blew on the lighter and it worked. Not much of a flame, but still.

"You see," Wyatt said. "Yours must be out of fluid."

The corporal stopped crying. He put a cigarette in his mouth, probably because he wanted to see the lighter work again. But this time Wyatt's lighter also failed. The medical sergeant struck a match and that seemed to satisfy the corporal. He smoked quietly.

"There's nothing wrong with this airplane, is there, sir?" said one of the Negroes. "We'll get there all right, won't we?"

They all looked at Wyatt.

"Sure, you'll get there," Wyatt said. "You've got the best airplane and two of the best pilots in Africa."

"You can say that again, sir. Boy, I'm telling you. Best damn airplane in Africa."

Wyatt's presence seemed to reassure him, and his happiness was felt in the whole cabin. He laughed so well and so loudly that everyone felt better for the time being.

"Boy, I'm telling you," the soldier said.

Captain Wyatt leaned toward the cabin wall. The touch of cold steel against the stubble of his jaw helped to keep him awake. Oh, you boys will get home all right, he thought. You're all out of it now. No you're not, at that. You'll never be out of it, not you. I will, though. Not this year, or next, but sometime. All I need is a little sleep now, a shower, a bed, and a good night's sleep.

Irving

October, 1946

In the Pentagon, I used to see a lot of Keith Derringer. His office was across the corridor from mine, and even while pressed for time he would always be ready to take half an hour off for griping. He worked for one of the top generals, a man given to making frequent and fairly long speeches in public. Keith had to write these, sometimes on three or four hours' notice. He had to write in a way to please his chief, his chief's chief, the War Department Bureau of

Public Relations, the Joint Security Board, A-2, and, whenever possible, the audience. To do so was not always easy, not even after he thought he had acquired the knack.

Keith had been in the habit of writing to please himself. In eighteen years as an increasingly good writer, he had written some books that he liked, at times, for as long as six months after publication. He had also managed to please enough other people to earn more money than he needed. He had carried the best of his habits, the habit of working hard, into the Army, and at first he saw no reason to regret this. Although he had come in with a captain's commission, he might easily have ended up as a post exchange officer in the Persian Gulf Command. He would not have liked that. The truth is, he was spending a couple of useful years in the Pentagon. I doubt if it is possible for a good writer of fiction really to waste time; Keith was charging up like a battery. Nevertheless, that habit of working hard placed him in an awkward situation.

His first few speeches had been sensible, literate, and geared to the audience. General Briggs, his chief, had read them off carefully, mispronouncing only enough words to infuse his delivery with a species of colloquial charm. Briggs always said calvary for cavalry, nonpulsed for nonplused, but so did a great many of the people who heard him, and the equation worked out fine. Keith's troubles began after Briggs had told too many colleagues about his efficient Captain, later Major and Lieutenant Colonel, Derringer who could whip up a corking speech in no time at all. Other generals, some of them too important for even Briggs to refuse, began to call on Keith's services, and soon, within a representative forty-eight-hour period, Keith was addressing the widow of a deceased British field marshal, a group of Ecuadorian attachés, and a gathering of the National Association of Manufacturers. He began to work nights and Sundays and then, in desperation, he asked Personnel to get him an assistant. He got Irving.

When I first saw Irving, he had already spent a couple of months in Keith's office. He had a desk sign twice the size of Keith's: 2ND LIEUT. IRVING BLATT. This struck me because Irving himself was very small. He had a good face, though his eyes were barely visible under the thick lenses. He could not have been out of Officer Candidate School long; he came to his feet almost at attention when he asked what I wanted. Colonel Derringer, he said, would be back shortly. I said I'd wait.

"Roger," he said.

He turned to his typewriter and began to operate it at such dazzling speed that I exchanged glances with old Miss Logan, the secretary. I had never seen such typing and said so as soon as he looked up.

"Major, you should have seen me when I was writing for the pulps at a penny a word," said Irving. "Novel writing has slowed me down considerably."

He was a writer, then, and as I later found out, contrived to work his writerhood into the first five minutes' conversation with anyone he met. It was not hard to find things out about Irving. He had a warm, friendly manner and liked to talk.

He came from New York where his parents owned a very small tailor shop on Second Avenue. Both his father and his mother had been born in Warsaw, and although they had arrived in the United States more than forty years ago, they spoke English so poorly that Irving himself had never altogether lost their accent. They had managed to send him through New York University at the cost of having to live in a single room and kitchen behind their shop.

If Irving had not been so nearsighted, he would certainly have helped out in that shop after school hours and during vacations. As it was, he found work as a towel boy in a Turkish bath on the East Side. By the time he got to college he had been made assistant to the masseur. He often spoke of those years at the Turkish bath in a tone of nostalgic and generous amusement. Much of his best material had been absorbed there, he said. Not a week passed but that some noted mobster, Legs Diamond or Larry Fay, would come in for a rubdown.

Irving graduated from college at a bad time. No one would give him a job. He told me that for three or four years he spent almost every morning on the prowl for work but the best he could do was a month of wrapping Christmas packages at a store on Fourteenth

Street. Then he began to write pulp stories and in a few years he was earning as much as twenty-five dollars a week. But only about a third of what he wrote was accepted, and this meant he had to average some four hundred thousand words a year. I don't think even Irving could have kept that up. Fortunately, he found he could earn a little more by writing mystery novels about an amateur detective named Sedgwick Cabot. He wrote four of these and they were published by a reputable firm. After a few weeks' acquaintance, he presented full sets of the Sedgwick Cabot series to Keith, Miss Logan, and me. The card accompanying my set read: "With muchos affection, Irving Blatt, Lieutenant, AUS."

The fact that he was a lieutenant, not a private, AUS, turned out in the long run to have been perhaps the most considerable benefit he derived from those books. A major at his post had for some time been a Cabot fan and saw to it that Irving was sent to the only Officer Candidate School open to limited-service men. At O.C.S. they taught Irving to make his bed, blitz his buckle, do close-order drill and keep accurate company records. Then they assigned him to Keith.

It is not easy to describe the Cabot books. They are, I should imagine, the purest examples of artistic compensation on record. Sedgwick Cabot is, of course, a Boston aristocrat. He lives with a maiden aunt in an enormous old mansion on Beacon Hill. He plays the 'cello *comme un ange*. He is six feet three, a foot taller than Irving, and his corkscrew punch to the midriff is a thing to see. He is perhaps the foremost living authority on Boccherini, who was patently Irving's idea of an obscure composer. He is equally at home in an opium den off the Embarcadero, at a coming-out party in the Pierre, down in a bathysphere or aloft at the controls of a PBY. His favorite gesture is to brush an unruly forelock from his right eye. It is a gesture that very few women can resist.

People in the Cabot books never leave the room. They take powders.

I once asked Keith how all that worked out in speeches for generals.

"Swimmingly," he said, "just swimmingly."

He showed me a graduation address that Irving had written for General Briggs himself.

"As you go on to honors and glory . . ." he read. "I can state without fear of successful contradiction . . . In the arduous days to come . . . As Napoleon so aptly said . . . The cups that cheer but not inebriate . . . Nothing can stop . . ."

"Stop," I said.

"And it works like a charm, as the lieutenant would say. I tell you, so far not a single general has been able to tell the difference. At first I used to take out the most egregious solecisms but now I just pass them along. And my airplane drivers declaim the stuff as if it had been written by Macaulay."

"Or Derringer."

"Or Derringer. Here's a little number Irving got up for Briggs to use this evening. Dinner for some visiting Brazilian birdman. 'Our destinies,' it says here, 'are inextricably intertwined.' Boy, wait till the old man tries to pronounce that. His tongue will be so inextricably intertwisted he won't be able to make another speech for three days."

"Are you going to leave it in?"

"Why not?"

I think he took it out, though. He had too much rank now to be assigned as PX officer to the Persian Gulf Command but they might still have put him to writing newspaper handouts in Manila. And with Irving in the office, at least some of the pressure was off Keith. He could now gripe for as long as an hour without being interrupted by the general's buzzer. Irving used to listen to his jeremiads with something akin to awe.

We showed off before Irving frequently and in fairly poor taste. For my part, I did a great deal of sanguine postwar planning with some money I had saved. The house I was going to build had no end of conveniences. And Keith, whose wife was rich and not unlike what Sedgwick Cabot's women were meant to resemble, talked a lot about the year's cruise he was going to take on her boat. Irving would listen attentively and I'm sure he described it all in the daily letters to his mother. Sometimes, in self-defense, he would repeat again a familiar resolution to get rid of his current literary agent who had, out of sheer rapacity, muffed a big deal with Paramount.

I had, I must add, mailed a number of those letters to his mother. The envelopes were invariably addressed to Mrs. Butch Blatt. I don't know why he called her that.

According to Keith, one reason for the generals' being fond of Irving's work was that the copy bristled with trade jargon. Irving had never been up in an airplane but he had virtually memorized his collection of field manuals and tech orders. He knew the speed, wing span, weight and characteristics of both Army and Navy aircraft a lot more accurately than Keith who had flown in most of them. And by the time he got through working these tidbits into a speech, you had an almost plausible product in the I'm-just-a-bluff-and-hearty-soldier-without-frills manner.

In some ways, Keith was very good to his assistant. Actual contact with generals all but paralyzed Irving, and Keith took pains to keep him shielded. As branch chief, Keith also went out of his way to get Irving promoted in the shortest possible time. In point of fact, it was established through the Adjutant General's Office that Irving was the first of his O.C.S. class to receive a captaincy. I was out of town when he got it but I understand it made him extremely happy. He gave Miss Logan a five-pound box of candy and bought a fifteen-dollar box of cigars for Keith.

By the time I came back, Irving was a full-blown captain. He had an elaborately detailed map of Japan covering the entire wall behind him, and colored thumbtacks to elucidate the Air Forces' system of targets. He talked of Japanese "capabilities" and our own "order of battle." He held cryptic telephone conversations of inordinate length and, besides the usual Rogers and Wilcos, told people he couldn't say anything at the moment but for them to keep their ears glued to the radio. He also wore a pair of Marine captain's bars which are prettier than the ones we had in the Army. I sometimes thought of the figure he must have cut during his increasingly frequent visits to Second Avenue.

Keith could endure just so much of this. He thought he had a book all clear in his mind, but the Army was hanging on to him. "Another year of the Pentagon will fix me good," he said. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." He was in no mood to put up with airs of authority and he took to baiting Irving rather cruelly.

He had a number of gambits, religious and political. Irving, like so many of his undergraduate contemporaries in New York, had once fancied himself a Marxist. He was, even now, a great village atheist and he would allow himself to be drawn into delivering long philippics against organized religion. And Keith would produce outrageous syllogisms designed to prove the existence of a Deity.

Keith and I used to lunch at the field-grade officers' cafeteria. There was no fresh fruit salad and sometimes no ice cream at the lunchrooms shared by civilians and junior officers.

"We ought to ask Irving out to lunch every now and then," he once said. "He just sits there waiting to be asked."

"Fine, let's."

"It's easy for you to talk. You don't squat in the same office with him all day. He doesn't say Wilco to you all day."

"All right. Let's not ask him then."

"He's such a really nice guy, though. You have no idea how nice. I would have had to fire old Logan if it hadn't been for Irving. She's plain incompetent. He does practically all her typing, his own, and mine too. He doesn't smoke but he stands in lines a hundred yards long just so he can send people cigarettes. He's forever mailing packages to people overseas, men he'd met only once or twice. He sits there waiting to be asked and we just walk past him every day."

"Let's ask him for lunch," I said.

I don't believe we ever did. Keith knew his own limitations; he could take so much of Irving, no more. And Irving adored him. Aside from a few religious and political convictions, many of Irving's attitudes and mannerisms took on Derringer overtones, always off-key. Keith himself had to note this and it embarrassed him no end. A few times he even lost his temper and Irving floundered so abjectly and tried so hard to expiate his crimes that he confused and appalled Keith. It was at such a moment of confusion and dismay that Keith involved me in a poker date at Irving's apartment.

"Irving wants us to meet his Cousin Hymie," he said, "his successful Cousin Hymie."

As a lieutenant, Irving had not had an apartment. He had lived in a small room at the YMCA and the way he happened to move out of there may be of interest.

The switchboard at the Y was not visible from the lobby and Irving had never seen the girl who operated it. But for a period of weeks they flirted over the telephone. He must have sounded pretty good to her because one day she agreed to meet him after six. She was to recognize him by the color of his hair and the uniform of an Air Forces lieutenant.

Irving and the girl came into the lobby almost at the same time. He looked at her and she was very fat and very plain, and she didn't like him, either. They walked away through different doors without saying a word. The next day Irving moved into an officers' club, and soon he found the apartment where Keith and I were to play poker with him and his Cousin Hymie. One of Irving's most engaging traits was that he could tell stories like this one about himself and the girl at the Y. He never, as far as Keith or I knew, did find a girl in Washington. He had a one-room apartment, and in a town like wartime Washington he could not find a girl.

We went up to his place after dinner. It was a pleasant room with a studio couch and several pieces of furniture that Irving had painted himself. He had three Van Gogh and two Gauguin reproductions, and he asked Keith's opinion of each. He was so frantically hospitable that I don't think either Keith or I managed to light a single one of our own cigarettes all evening. He emptied ashtrays with a single butt in them and kept filling our glasses after every swallow. He looked happy. He was about to put in a manly night of poker and he was displaying his friends, a lieutenant colonel and a major, to Hymie.

Hymie took us in his stride. He was a large man with a large face, and he chewed on the same cigar right through the game. We had not played many hands before it was evident that he deserved his success in the wholesale silk line. By one o'clock, to Irving's deep consternation, he had cleaned every scrap of meat off our bones. We had one taxi fare left between Keith and me. It was months before Irving stopped apologizing for his churlish cousin. Keith finally issued an order of the day forbidding him to mention Hymie.

During the last spring of the war, Keith was offered a chance to conduct a group of magazine writers on a tour of Air Force installations in the Pacific. He didn't feel like taking it. He would have liked the trip but he was not going to play nursemaid to a dozen journalists. Irving, on the other hand, begged to go. As a limited service man, he said, he could never get overseas except on temporary duty orders and this was his big, his only chance. Couldn't Keith spare him for just six weeks?

Keith could. Briggs was away and the speech load had eased up.

Irving was ecstatic. And from then on he became utterly useless in the office. He drew everything he possibly could from the Quartermaster store on Connecticut Avenue: mosquito net, helmet, escape kit, jungle knife, flashlights, courier pouch, musette bag, sun glasses, sulfa pills, and an honest-to-God forty-five. He studied Tagalog out of the Army booklet, took a first-aid course at Belvoir and target practice at Bolling. After two years in the Air Corps, he was going to get his first ride in an airplane.

A number of things went wrong. Several of the journalists reneged at the last minute, and the War Department threatened to cancel the tour unless new ones, of appropriate standing, were found. Keith called a few of his friends but none of them seemed interested. Irving went up to New York and made the rounds of magazines and literary agents. He did find a couple of widely unknown fiction writers, and the War Department took Keith's word for them. But there was still another man needed to fill the rather arbitrary quota set by Public Relations. In despair, Irving discovered the long distance telephone.

He called an imposing list of writers in Bucks County and Connecticut. He telephoned editors in Texas and picture people on the Coast. He was drunk with the glory of being able to lift up a receiver and talk to 20th Century-Fox. Keith, who was responsible to the budget and fiscal office, had to stop him.

"Why don't you try William Dean Howells?" Keith said. "He's a little old but he might want to take a fling at it."

I thought I had known Irving but it was Keith who really knew him.

"Would he be acceptable to the Bureau?" he asked.

"I think so," Keith said. "He's prominent enough."

"What has he done, exactly?"

"Well, he used to edit the *Atlantic Monthly*."

Irving went out and came back carrying a volume of *Who's Who*.

"You'd think a man who had edited the *Atlantic Monthly* would be listed," he said. "Have you any idea if he works with an agent?"

Keith had the humanity not to go through with it. He was so abashed, in fact, that he not only dug up another journalist for Irving but bought him an expensive going-away present. Irving left in June, and in July we got a cable with the single sentence that he had been killed on a B-25 combat mission over Formosa, details to follow.

Some details came through the same afternoon. Irving had been extremely efficient in attending to the needs of his group. He got them as far as Manila where the journalists wanted to rest. He then talked some officers into letting him go along on the invasion of Borneo. He went ashore with the Australians in the first wave. He was either very brave or he got lost, because he ended up ahead of the advance patrols who almost mistook him for a Japanese. A destroyer brought him back to Luzon where the journalists were still gathering material.

On Luzon, he talked another colonel into assigning him to a B-25 outfit for a day. The squadron was part of a large formation sent against some supply dumps in southern Formosa. Irving's airplane, along with the rest, performed well over the primary target. But coming back, his pilot ventured an unauthorized strafing run on a gun emplacement. The airplane exploded at three hundred feet, and the loss was put down to flak.

Keith took it hard. He called his wife and told her he would not be home for dinner. She had never known Irving, and Keith wanted to be with someone who had. We went to a French restaurant where Keith said they had good Martinis. He drank too many, and I made the error of trying to keep up with him.

"He was a really nice guy," Keith said. "Foolish but terribly nice. I can't tell you how much he's done for Logan. No one except Irving has been kind to Logan for twenty years."

"He had to go along on a mission. Borneo wasn't enough."

"You know why, don't you?"

"No."

"He was going to sit across the room from me and he was going to think, 'Well, Colonel, you may know all about William Dean Howells and you may have spent a lot more time than I in airplanes, but by God, you've never been on a combat mission over Formosa and you never went ashore with the first wave on Borneo. You and your friends may never ask me to lunch, but by God, I was out there when the chips were down and no one was making me do it. You sat in an air-conditioned building while I was hacking my way through the jungle.' That's why he went."

"No, that's just part of it," I said. "He wasn't showing you up or anything like that. What you forget is that Irving was having an absolutely gorgeous time. He was a captain in the Air Corps and he was the only soldier in a group of civilians and he was packing a forty-five. That's a pretty long way from the Turkish bath, even via Sedgwick Cabot. He probably died quite happy, whatever that means."

"You don't feel a thing," Keith said. "By the time the pain gets up to the brains, there are no brains."

"He sent me a card from Hollywood."

"That's true about the gorgeous time, isn't it? He even got to visit

Hollywood. He was going to come back and tell us about the time in Hollywood and the time in Manila and what MacArthur said."

"I wish I had bought him a going-away present. He did owe me ten dollars, though."

"He didn't particularly like Logan. But he used to do all the typing just so I wouldn't have to fire her."

We covered the whole subject of Irving in some detail. All we left out was that he had been the only child of two very old people who lived behind a tailor shop.

Position of the Soldier

July, 1943

At Officer Candidate School our squadron lived in an Army hotel just large enough to hold the two hundred of us. For our last six weeks, as upper classmen, we moved down to the first and second floors. The squadron's new lower class was assigned to the third and fourth.

It was several days before we found time to arrange our rooms according to all the regulations. I had just begun to scrape the paint spots off our bathroom floor when my roomie came in and said, "There's a lower classman crying in 408. Hurley's been bracing him for the last half-hour, and the poor son of a bitch just stands there bawling. I tried to get Hurley to lay off. No soap."

Let me tell you about Hurley. No, let me first tell you about bracing. Officially, the school defined bracing as an exaggerated position of attention. In a brace you stood rigidly, shoulders back, chest out, buttocks and stomach in just as far as possible. Your eyes were not to waver under any provocation. After a stiff brace, conscientiously administered, your body was apt to ache for some time.

Lower classmen were required to stand three bracing formations a day, each lasting fifteen or twenty minutes. Upper classmen walked along the line, correcting posture and asking questions. There was only one acceptable answer to each question, and after a while lower classmen learned to snap these out in the exacted military manner. Then, in the evenings, upper classmen had thirty minutes of visiting privileges in order to carry on the work in the rooms of their subordinates.

The idea had been explained to us by the tactical officer only on the day we ourselves became upper classmen. Up to that point we had been in pretty much of a blizzard.

"You've got to give them a nervous jolt so bad it'll knock them clear out of the old G.I. rut," said the tac officer. "Confuse them. Bewilder them. Humiliate them. Rip them up and tear them down so completely they won't know whether they're coming or going. Your job now is to work toward the ideal of becoming the most hated upperclassman in O.C.S. You jolt them out of the G.I. rut in their first six weeks, tear them down, and hand them over to me when they're ready to be molded. I'll make men and officers out of them in the next month and a half, just like I'm going to make men and officers out of you."

That was how we found out what had been happening to us in the preceding weeks. As a matter of fact, only a handful of upper-class candidates had subjected us to the treatment in any sustained form. But that handful had been enough to make a lot of people wish they had stayed enlisted men for the duration. Things got so rugged that a number of us took what amounted to an oath not to stand for anything of the sort during our senior term.

As it turned out, there was very little we could do about bracing. Most of my classmates went through the motions and at least six or eight of them followed our tac officer's orders to the letter—Hurley, for one.

I was going to tell you about Hurley, but I find I don't have much to tell. He had been in the service four years, since he was nineteen or twenty. Ratings must have been tough at his old station, because he had come into O.C.S. as a buck sergeant. His brother, as he somehow managed to state in the course of even the briefest conversation, was a flying officer, a lieutenant colonel. Maybe that was one of the things that made him act the way he did. I can't say. It certainly could not have been any physical deficiency. A lot of small men liked to brace the hell out of six-footers, but Hurley was just short of six feet himself and well set up.

Once or twice I tried to argue it out with him on his own level. I said if a man was any good in the first place, you couldn't break him down in six weeks. If he wasn't, he had no business in the school. Also, if he wasn't any good but had managed to get in, and you did succeed in breaking him down, how could you possibly rebuild and mold him in six weeks? But all Hurley did was repeat everything the tac officer had said, including the one about if a man couldn't stand the gaff at O.C.S., how can he be expected to take it in combat? If they crack under this, said Hurley, will you assume the responsibility of placing them in charge of a security squadron at an advance base?

I went up to 408, where Hurley was supposed to have this lower classman quivering and in tears. It was a small corner room with only two beds. The names on the door were Meriwether and Boyd. Hurley was bracing them both.

Meriwether was the largest man in the squadron, six foot six. He had been a nationally known basketball player and had come to school on Physical Training orders. He was good-natured and rather proud of his impeccable brace. He stood against the wall and I could see he was not in any kind of trouble. The other man, Boyd, braced in the middle of the room, with Hurley walking around him. His cheeks were quivering, and there was so much sweat rolling off his forehead and down over his eyes that he appeared to be crying. Maybe he was.

I had noticed Boyd before because of his ribbons—the red one for good conduct, the Purple Heart, the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre ribbon with a star on it, and a fourth one that I could not make out. His eyes were fixed on a point with the prescribed glassy stare.

Hurley stopped in back of him. He said, "Mister, are you drawing flying pay?"

"No, sir."

"Well, pull those wings in then. Glue those arms to your sides. Reach for the ground. Reach for the ground, Mister, just as far as those arms will go. Now rack those shoulders back as far as *they'll* go."

Every time Boyd reached for the ground, his shoulders naturally came forward a little.

"Mister, may I touch you?" Hurley asked. Army tradition forbids you to touch a man without his permission. In our squadron, no lower classman had ever been known to refuse.

"Yes, sir," Boyd said.

Hurley placed the back of his forefinger between Boyd's shoulder blades. "Now rack 'em back until you pinch my finger," he said.

Boyd strained and sweated. He had a leathery, deeply lined face, the kind you see on a lot of farmers. Reminded me of a crew chief I used to know up at Wright Field. The corners of Boyd's mouth were drawn back by the strain, and at times his entire face twitched.

"Mister," Hurley said, "pull your tail in."

Boyd pulled his tail in.

"Now let's see what you look like from the front," Hurley said, walking around him. "Mister, how old are you?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Thirty-eight what?"

"Thirty-eight years."

"I mean thirty-eight *what,* Mister?"

"Thirty-eight years, sir."

"Very good, Mister Boyd. Then let's see thirty-eight wrinkles in that chin. Pull it in. Are your feet at a forty-five-degree angle?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

Boyd glanced down at his feet.

"Keep your eyes on a point straight ahead," Hurley said. "You're in a brace, Mister. Now, how do you know your feet are at a forty-five-degree angle?"

"No excuse, sir." Boyd had learned that there were only three answers he was allowed to give in response to a question like that—"Yes, sir," "No, sir," "No excuse, sir." Lower classmen were not permitted to say, "I don't know."

"Instinct, Mister. By this time, instinct should tell you the position of your feet. Mister, what was your p.c.s.?"

"No excuse, sir."

"You mean to say you don't know what your previous condition of servitude was?"

"Sir, my previous condition of servitude was master sergeant at different stations in the Philippines and Hawaii."

"Very good, Mister Boyd. Now tell me why you came to O.C.S."

"I came here to work for a commission, sir."

"Mister, you're wrong. You came here to learn discipline, discipline, and more discipline. Will you remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

Hurley wheeled around very fast. "Mister Meriwether," he said, "are you smiling?"

"No, sir."

"I think you smiled, Mister Meriwether. Wipe it off."

Meriwether ran a hand over his mouth.

"Throw it away."

Meriwether threw the smile away.

"Step on it."

Meriwether stamped his foot.

"Now pick it up."

Meriwether scooped up his smile.

"I don't think you got all of it, Mister. Pick up the rest."

Meriwether gathered up the rest of his smile and hit a brace again.

"There is nothing funny at O.C.S.," Hurley said. He turned again. "You're relaxing, Mister Boyd. I want you to suck in that horrible gut."

Boyd sucked until I could see the fluttering of his stomach muscles through the fabric of his shirt. His brace was every bit as good as Meriwether's, though not so spectacular. Sweat dripped from his jaws. His shirt had soaked through.

"Mister Boyd," said Hurley, "are you proud to be at O.C.S.?"

Boyd didn't answer. Hurley came very close to him and repeated the question, practically whispering it into his ear.

"Yes, sir," Boyd said.

"You don't look very proud. Mister Meriwether, does he look proud to you?"

"No excuse, sir."

"He doesn't look very proud to me. Mister Boyd, have you memorized your definition of discipline yet?"

Boyd started to recite it but broke down. "No excuse, sir," he said. His voice was barely audible. He had bitten his lower lip, and a drop of blood had begun to form.

"I'll take them from here on," I said to Hurley. "You go into one of the other rooms."

He had to go, because I was his superior in the squadron. After he left, I told Boyd to go into the washroom and gave Meriwether at ease. Meriwether waited until Boyd had shut the door. Then he came to attention.

"Sir, Officer Candidate Meriwether reports to ask a question." He knew he did not have to run through that form with me, but Hurley must have shaken even him up a little.

"At ease, for Christ's sake," I said. "How long has Hurley been doing this?"

"Every chance he gets. It doesn't bother me at all, but you can see John takes it hard. John's been on the point of cashing in his chips ever since we got here. Last night a couple of us had to sit on him, almost. He was going to the tac officer and hand in his resignation. It took three of us to hold him down, I guess, not a couple. Wouldn't think it to look at him, but he tosses me around like a sack of wheat. I was supposed to have been something of a wrestler, but John is the best judo man I ever saw. That's one of the things that scares me. If he ever lets go, he'll kill Mister Hurley. Isn't there anything you could do?"

"No. Hurley's the one who's obeying orders. I'm violating them right now."

"Somebody better do something," Meriwether said. "John isn't built to take this kind of guff. He's been a master sergeant for ten years and he's broken more than his share of captains and majors into the business of running outfits. I've only known John for six months and I wouldn't pretend to understand him, but don't get the idea he's scared of Mister Hurley. He's scared he'll kill him, that's what he's scared of."

"Friend, you're not wrong," Boyd said. He was standing in the doorway. He had washed his face and seemed entirely composed. "Sir," he said to me, "why can't I hit him?"

"You can't, that's why."

"I know I can't. How long will I have to stand for it, though? I don't see myself doing this for another five and a half weeks."

"Maybe he'll lay off you," I said. "Maybe he'll pick on somebody else."

"I don't want a commission this bad," Boyd said. "I was doing all right. Never would have come here if it hadn't been for my wife. We only just got married after I came back to Oahu from the Philippines. I reckon I got sick of watching her take a back seat to a lot of officers' wives. I reckon she got sick of it herself. But I don't need this punk to teach me about discipline. I never did have a head for memorizing things."

"Well, at least don't pin that on him," I said. "We all had to memorize this corn. Stay away from him as much as you can and try not to let him get your goat. What the hell else can I say?"

"Nothing. Thanks all the same."

From there on out, Hurley and I wrestled for Boyd's soul. I would follow Hurley during the bracing formations and try to undo some of the damage. In a less systematic way, several other upper classmen did the same. Then, through Meriwether, I found out that Boyd wasn't hearing from his wife, and that didn't help.

When the four-week standings came out Boyd was way down on the list. Two of the men who had stood higher had washed out and it was obvious that only Boyd's record and his Purple Heart ribbon had kept him in. He knew more Army than any of us but he kept muffing exams and recitations. The men in his flight said he would get up in class and stammer and stumble just as if he were back on the bracing line. According to Meriwether, the strain of controlling himself in Hurley's presence had thrown Boyd for a loss.

Unfortunately, Hurley marched behind Boyd in the parade formations and this enabled him to harass his man at will. Boyd could do the gaudiest manual of arms in the squadron—in the whole school, perhaps—but with Hurley directly back of him, muttering "Cant right, butt left" all the way, he was bound to make a few mistakes.

Parades were the central fact of our existence. Our entire training was pointed toward performing well at those weekend reviews. Low academic grades, failure to wear garters at reveille, improper haircuts —the most egregious of such violations would be at least partly condoned if our squadron took the blue-and-white ribbon on Saturday or Sunday. We were judged by West Point standards and it was not easy to outpoint thirty-five other squadrons, equally well drilled and subjected to the same between-the-halves emotion. Before passing in review, we would stand at the most rigid sort of attention for forty-five minutes, with the first sergeant taking notes behind us. A slight movement of the head meant five demerits, and few men could afford the consequent loss of fifty points in the competitive standings. Before we found out that we could keep some blood in circulation by moving our fingers and toes, we had a very trying time. Since no one was allowed to walk off under his own power, candidates would pass out now and then. On a hot day, the ambulances behind the line would be pretty well filled. And if you had the bad luck to draw a blank, you would have to write the Military Board a letter listing everything you had eaten in the previous twenty-four hours. Men had been washed out for having owned up to a couple of beers.

Up to the tenth week, our squadron never had more than one man pass out at a parade, but on the eleventh Sunday we had an epidemic. The thermometer read 132 in the sun. Three men went down in the back, where I could not see them, but I did see the fourth begin to sway. It was Hurley.

He swayed at first with a circular motion and then from side to side. The back of his neck turned chalky white. The men on his flanks took a chance on being gigged themselves and leaned slightly toward him for support. That helped for a time. But then Hurley went down to his knees, stood up, went down again, and finally pitched forward. Whether it was sunstroke or heat prostration, he must have had it bad, because after he was carried away we heard the ambulance taking off. As a rule, it would be kept on the grounds for more customers.

The experience, I thought, would take some of the starch out of Hurley. But that same evening I found him in 408, bracing Meriwether and Boyd. I stopped in the doorway.

"Mister Meriwether," he said, "let's see the buttons on that shirt pop. And suck in that nauseating gut. Suck. Mister, do you see any lavender spots before your eyes?"

"No, sir."

"Well, suck until you do."

Meriwether braced like a yogi, and Hurley turned to Boyd.

"Mister," he said, "do you know your definition of discipline?"

"Yes, sir."

According to honor-system rules, Hurley had to take Boyd's word for it, and he did. He said, "High time, Mister. Now let's hear about the position of the soldier and let's hear about it verbatim."

"Sir," Boyd said, "to take the position of attention place your heels together and on the same line. Allow your feet to turn out equally, forming an angle of forty-five degrees with each other. Keep your knees straight but without stiffness. Draw your hips up under your body slightly. Keep your chest up and your shoulders back. Do not allow one shoulder to be higher than the other. Keep your arms straight without stiffness, and hanging at your sides in such a way that your thumbs are always along the seams of your trousers. Turn the backs of your hands out away from your body and allow your hands and fingers to cup naturally. Always keep your eyes straight to the front. When standing properly the weight of your body will be divided equally between the heels and balls of both feet. When assuming the position of attention, bring your heels together smartly and audibly."

It was an astonishing performance. Boyd had not missed a word and I knew he must have stayed awake nights to get it down like that. Keeping his eyes properly glazed, he had droned off old Paragraph 87 as if the book had been in front of him. Then he clamped his chin down and hit a brace as good as Meriwether's.

"Excellent," Hurley said. "At ease, gentlemen. Which one of you is room orderly for the week?"

"Sir, I am," Boyd said.

Hurley pulled a white cotton glove out of his pocket and put it on with a deliberateness that was straight Erich von Stroheim. He bent down and ran a gloved finger along the bottom of Boyd's bedspring. Then he stood up and studied his outstretched middle finger. Without saying anything, he showed it to all three of us. The glove had a light smudge of dust on it. "Mister Boyd," he said, "when I come up here tomorrow I want that spring to shine. In the meantime, turn yourself in for a gig."

"Mister Hurley," I said, "go down to the orderly room and see if the first sergeant has finished the duty roster for tomorrow."

He left, and a couple of minutes later I followed him.

In the orderly room, I said, "You know damn well Boyd can't afford any gigs. He's still in the danger zone."

"A single gig won't matter one way or the other," Hurley said. "The trouble is, you're all still scared of master sergeant's stripes. I'm not. Just because the guy happened to stop a piece of shrapnel and got out of the real fighting on Bataan, he's little King Jesus in this squadron. As far as I'm concerned he's still got to prove he can take it. Real bracing, the kind my brother took at West Point, the kind I took last month, will bring out a yellow streak every time."

"You never had to take anything like the kind you're handing out."

"Maybe I did and maybe I didn't. Maybe I just happen to think a man ought to work for his bars and prove he's got a right to wear them."

"I want to be there when they get to you Black Friday," I said.

"Make sure you are," said Hurley. "You'll find out what an officer should act like under pressure."

On Black Friday, four days before graduation, the lower class was given its chance to run the squadron from reveille to taps. True, such plans as the boys might have entertained had to be tempered by a reflection that the seniors were going to take over again until Tuesday. But we did stand the bracing formations, and they did have visiting privileges. A lot of us were interested in what would happen to Hurley.

I don't know where they apply the silent treatment to cadets, whether it's at West Point or Annapolis, but whichever it is I found out that it can be a fairly deadly sort of thing. The lower class worked it on Hurley. When we lined up for bracing, I made a point of standing next to him. I hoped to see the fireworks, but nothing happened. No one said a word to him. What made it worse was that they braced me the way I had braced them.

Meriwether stopped in front of me and said, "Mister, suck in that gruesome gut. Shoulders back. Reach for the ground."

Instead of straining my arms I bent down and touched the ground.

"Very good," he said. He placed his thumbs between my shoulder blades. "Pinch that thumb."

I turned around and pinched his thumb with my fingers.

"Splendid. Mister, are your eyes roving? Don't you know you're supposed to keep them fixed on a point?"

"I'm keeping them on a moving point, sir."

"Splendid, splendid," said Meriwether. "Excellent. Mister, I'm putting you down for corps commander."

They ignored Hurley not only during the three bracing formations but also in the corridors. As lower classmen approached him, he would hit a brace against the nearest wall, as required, but they all passed him by without so much as giving him at ease. When visiting privileges were called, no one went near his room.

Hurley took it hard. I didn't hear him say anything, but he looked pretty grim, and one of the lower classmen, a kid named Ogden, told me that Hurley had asked him if he was scared of bracing a senior with four more days to go.

I missed my guess about those four days. I thought Hurley would lace it into the boys, but he didn't. He kept to himself and ignored them, if anything, even more ostentatiously than they had ignored him. Having failed in his effort to make men and officers out of a collection of natural-born G.I.'s, he retreated with the dignity of the professional soldier vanquished by odds.

On graduation day there was a good deal of sentiment. We were glad to get out and the lower class was glad to see us go. Everybody wished everybody luck. According to squadron tradition, the lower class presented each of us with a set of gold-plated bars, and those who wished to present their gifts individually, did so. Boyd brought me mine. I gave him the address of my new station and we both said we would write, knowing that we wouldn't.

A couple of months later I ran into one of his classmates, who told me that although John Boyd had remained in the danger zone throughout, he had been graduated in good order and sent to Salt Lake City. That meant he was on his way back to the Pacific Theatre and had a good chance to see his wife in Oahu. I never did find out whether she had written him or not.

Poker Game

December, 1945

At a dinner party many years ago, Lyle Henshaw was pointed out to me by an old actress as "the only romantic man left in New York." What she probably meant was that he had once made a lot of money and then spent it all on a girl who wouldn't have anything to do with him. The actress went into considerable detail: there was something about a chinchilla jacket and a notorious blowout at the old Silver Slipper; large doings, very Scott Fitzgerald, very sad. I looked at Henshaw, who was a small, carelessly dressed man, unobtrusively drunk. He left early because he had a night job then with one of the wire services.

I later got to know him fairly well. We shared interests in horse racing and seafood, and we often lunched together, always downtown and always late in the afternoon. Even after he took a day job on a city desk, he kept unusual hours. He continued to drink a great deal, and he was given to long sessions of poker. Once he had to undergo an operation for ulcers, and the doctor was surprised to see him pull through. People were forever giving him six months or a year to live. It became a sort of ritual to deplore Lyle Henshaw's state of health. And the concern was usually genuine; both men and women liked him.

At the age of forty-three, Lyle enlisted in the Army. He did personnel work for about a year, and then he was sent to Officer Candidate School at Miami Beach. How he got by there, how he could ever run three miles or do forty pushups, is more than I can account for. The fact is, he made it, losing only three of his one hundred and twenty pounds in the process. By the time I ran into him in England, he told me he had climbed back to a hundred and nineteen, but he was still probably as friable a second lieutenant as we had in the Air Corps.

They had him employed as an assistant adjutant in a P-38 outfit near Ipswich. He never could get hold of a jeep, so it was I who did all the visiting. But one night he came over to my base, and a bad thing happened.

I didn't know he was coming over. I had been promised a London pass, which fell through when my squadron drew night alert. As intelligence officer, I was more or less expected to be on hand, and I wandered back and forth between the operations office and the alert shack. The fliers in the shack had a poker game going.

Entirely aside from pulling alert, three of the four players had reason to be browned off. Earl Fuller had a painful boil on the back of his neck. Mosconi had not heard from his girl in a month. And Waddy Craig, the flight leader, had just sustained a whole series of indignities. Dutch Westervelt, too, seemed willing to play, although it looked like a rough game, with too much money changing hands.

I have to explain why Waddy Craig was in a particularly irritable mood that night. Earlier in the week he had shot down two Messerschmitts in as many minutes, and the Group C.O. had rewarded him with a three-day pass to London. We never found out what kind of a time he had there, because all he would talk about was a girl he met on the train back to Ipswich. She was built like this and had things like that and her father owned a stable full of hunters, and Waddy, who had played polo at West Point, was going to ride them all. And he had a big date lined up for Friday, when there were no missions scheduled, and the whole thing was in the bag, solid. She was built like this and had things like that. He almost blew a gasket when Fighter Command decided to run a mission on Friday.

He still hoped to keep his date, though. By some pretty close arithmetic, he figured that if he got his barbering done before the takeoff, wore his dress uniform under the flying clothes, and had a jeep waiting when the squadron returned, he could be on time to meet her. You had to hand it to Waddy. He came to the briefing in Class A greens, ribbons and all. It must have taken everything he had to stand up under the gags, because he failed to grasp one of the most important points made by Ted Bennett, the Group intelligence officer. There was later an argument about whether the point had been sufficiently stressed, and the fact that Waddy had missed three days of briefing earlier in the week served as some excuse, but the rest of us had all heard Bennett tell the men to strafe nothing in areas less than fifty miles going southeast from the Seine.

The formation ran into weather, and Waddy got lost in the soup. He wasn't the only one; several of the others never did come back. But Waddy's navigation was excellent. When he realized he couldn't rejoin the formation, he followed orders and looked for a target of opportunity. He found a good one while he still had plenty of gas. It was a troop concentration, with several artillery pieces plainly visible. As luck would have it, the troops were American. Moreover, they shot up Waddy's expensive airplane on its very first run. He had to make a forced landing, and he stepped out of his cockpit into the hands of a battalion that had been on the road for twenty hours. Neither men nor officers were in the proper frame of mind to be strafed by American airplanes. And when they saw Waddy in Class A greens, his ribbons groaning under the weight of clusters, they really went to town. For one thing, they were sure he was a spy; nobody dressed like that for combat. Waddy told them he had a date with a girl in Ipswich, and they nearly lynched him. After some hours of intermittent grilling, they sent him a couple of echelons back, where the West Point Protective and Benevolent Association took over. It was well after midnight when Waddy showed up at our base.

His punishment was to stay away from girls, all girls, until further notice. Specifically, the C.O. forbade him to communicate with the little one who was built like this and had things like that. He was a very good flier, and the old man let him off easy. But Waddy felt put upon. He got mad and stayed mad. It was he who proposed the high stakes that night in the alert shack. Earl Fuller and Mosconi agreed to them readily enough, and Dutch went along just because he was always agreeable. No one said anything about the boil on Earl's neck or wondered aloud why Mosconi's girl had stopped writing, but everybody knew almost everything about everybody there. I must say I've seen happier games of poker.

In less than an hour, Mosconi lost over six hundred dollars. I certainly wouldn't undertake to determine whether he could afford it or not. Depends, as they say, on your point of view. Mosconi came from lower east Harlem. His father cleaned windows for a living, and his mother made artificial flowers at home. He had told us that, before coming into the service, he had never owned more than fifty dollars at any one time. On being commissioned, he allotted a hundred a month to his parents and blew in the rest as the spirit moved him. "If I get knocked off, my mother gets ten thousand dollars," he said. "That's more than she could earn for the rest of her life." He held out all his fingers. "Ten thousand fish." Mosconi talked with his whole body. He was a sallow-faced, highly charged little Italian, and he moved as if he were dodging blows. The flight surgeon said he had miraculous reflexes. "You'd have them, too," Mosconi said, "if you grew up playing stickball on a Hundred and Ninth Street. You get the hell out of the way of those fruit trucks or you won't have no reflexes left, or legs, either."

The impression Earl Fuller gave was that he could have moved almost as fast if he had to, and he must have had to, from time to time, because he'd been on the basketball team at Utah. Seated in a P-51, his head just about touched the plexiglas. At the poker table, he moved only his long arms, partly out of natural lassitude and partly because the boil on his neck really annoyed him.

I watched the game for a while, but I know nothing about poker. They were playing with cash, though, and I could tell that Dutch was winning most of the money. It didn't seem to make much difference. They were all in the same flight, and money, besides being cheap, was forever passing back and forth. I doubt whether any of the four knew accurately who, at any point, owed how much to whom. As a unit, they had flown together longer than any other flight in the entire wing, and they were very close friends.

"It isn't good to be that close," Paul Daly once told me. Paul was deputy C.O. of the Group, and he had flown more missions than anyone else at the base. "You get so you can't do without each other and then whammo, somebody gets killed. Not for me. My only friend is heating up a chair at Patterson Field, and that's just where I want him. I don't want any more friends in the E.T.O. Every guy I ever came to know real well out here got his. I'll fly with them and I'll drink with them and I'll give them any telephone number in my book, but no more of this angel food about friendship and all that. Let Waddy Craig or any of those others get shot down and the whole flight'll go to pieces. You watch."

Paul had invented a gadget to calculate fliers' chances of survival, and it was surprisingly like the one Statistical Control had in the Air Room at the Pentagon. About the only difference was that Paul had built his out of wood and cardboard, while the pretty one in Washington had a sliding scale of lucite.

I got tired of watching the poker game and thought I'd look in on Paul. In the operations office they told me he had gone to his quarters, and I followed him there. The assistant S-2 could do my work if anything came up. Paul and I threw darts for about two hours, off and on.

When I got back to the alert shack, Lyle Henshaw was installed at the table. He'd been playing poker there, it seemed, most of the time I was gone.

"I looked all over for you," he said. "Then these gentlemen were kind enough to ask if I'd take a hand. I'm afraid I can't stop right now."

"I'll say he can't," Mosconi said. "He's way ahead."

I hadn't realized how much older Lyle had grown until I saw him among those boys. And somehow, even in an officer's uniform, he managed to look a little seedy. With his blouse unbuttoned and his service cap pushed back, the air of the city room hung, I thought, unmistakably about him. Outranked and a stranger, he yet seemed to be in complete, if careless, charge of the game.

Back in the States, perhaps the only thing that had kept Lyle and me from becoming intimate friends was his passion for poker. He played three or four times a week, often as not through the night, while I can barely tell the suits apart. His regular partners were theatre people, and the stakes were usually high. As a rule, the game was played in the office of a producer of musical comedies.

Lyle had a prodigious fund of theatre talk. He knew who had been in the road companies of old Ziegfeld shows, how the kickback system worked with house musicians, what had become of the obscure member of some vaudeville team—odds and ends like that. There was nothing professional about his interest in all this. He simply remembered what people had told him, just as he remembered every remarkable combination of cards he'd held. He remembered what Helen Westley had said after reading the script of "Strange Interlude," and it was funny even as he bowdlerized it for mixed company. He had a way of transmuting gossip into lore. What I'm trying to say is that he certainly brightened up the United Kingdom for me.

He did nothing of the sort for the boys in the alert shack. He took their money as fast as they could shove it onto the table. The performance would have been monotonous if it hadn't been so startling. I'd always supposed there was much more of an element of luck in poker and that an inexperienced player who got the breaks had a safe edge even over experts. Maybe that's so. Maybe Lyle was just having a streak. In any event, Mosconi had to drop out, then Waddy, and then Earl. Dutch and Lyle went on playing, and when they finished up, Lyle had over three thousand dollars in front of him.

Long before that, I had wondered how the boys had happened to ask him into their game. Lyle was, after all, a ground officer, a paddlefoot, who, aside from his incongruous rank, couldn't possibly rate with them. The squadron commander had once made a little speech about how ground officers were just as human as you or me, but hell, that was months ago and so much hogwash anyway. Why, those jokers talked for a week about a couple of JU-88s that got through and dropped a few five-hundred-pounders a mile away. That was their idea of war. Waddy had, in fact, as he watched Lyle take Earl to the cleaners, mumbled some not very clear reflection on people who had plenty of time to learn about poker. I hadn't thought anything of it.

After Dutch said he was through, Lyle took a rubber band off the table and put it around the bundle of cash. "I hope you gentlemen will take this money back," he said. "It wouldn't be very sociable of me to walk off with it."

"What do you mean?" Dutch said. "Don't you P-38 people play for keeps? We do."

"You shouldn't," said Lyle. "You haven't played enough poker to throw this kind of money around." He moved the bundle toward the center of the table.

Waddy moved it back. "You take that."

"I'm afraid I can't. I probably should have quit after the first few hands. I'm sorry to do it like this. I assure you it's not a grandstand play. Don't mind my saying so, but you're all beginners and I've been at this game most of my life. So please take your shares back and let's call it an evening's entertainment."

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Waddy said. "Now, you just pick up your marbles and go home. Go home and buy yourself a new tie. That one's full of gravy. You're not dealing with a bunch of kids, Mister."

Lyle looked at me, at Earl, at Dutch, and then he turned to Waddy again.

"You're kids when it comes to poker," he said. "You don't know how to bet. You don't know when to bluff. And you have no business putting up this kind of money against a stranger. It's all right among yourselves, but you don't know anything about me. I was just a man who came in here looking for someone. No, I'm not having any of your marbles, Captain, and I'll take my own sweet time about going home, too."

"Is that all you have to say?" Waddy asked.

Lyle got up and buttoned his blouse. "For the time being," he said.

"Well, then it's my turn to get a few things off my chest. Suppose you come to attention while I'm doing it."

"Wait a minute," I said.

"Don't wait," Waddy said. "Just you come to attention right quick, Mr. Henshaw."

"I take it he ranks you, too," said Lyle. He grinned and came to attention.

"He ranks me by four months," I said.

Waddy leaned back in his chair. "In the first place," he said, "when I see someone wearing that uniform, I assume he's not a card sharp but a gentleman, if only by act of Congress. I could be wrong. Maybe he just happened to know a congressman and got himself a mail-order commission for the asking. Then maybe he slips into a soft ground job and sits around all day learning how to handle a deck of cards. That's O.K. with me. But once I start playing with him, I play for money and I don't want it thrown back in my face nohow. If I can afford to put my tail on the line over Germany, I can also afford to drop a few hundred bucks without being lectured about it."

"You're a first-class fighting man, sir," Lyle said.

"And you're at attention. Yes, as it happens, I *am* a first-class fighting man. And so is Lieutenant Mosconi, who's just about your weight and would be happy to demonstrate outside if you like."

"Don't be a damned fool, Craig," I said.

"Captain Craig to you," said Waddy.

"Lieutenant Henshaw wishes to make a comment," Lyle said.

"Go ahead."

"I should very much like to go outside with your subordinate, sir."

It sounds crazy as I tell it now, but we did go outside, and Mosconi did knock Lyle practically out with one ghastly punch in the eye. Then the four fliers went back to the alert shack, and while I was trying, in the bright moonlight, to do something about the eye, Waddy came to the door and threw the bundle of money toward us. It struck Lyle's knee.

Lyle left it there on the ground. At base headquarters a medic put a bandage on his eye, and I had a cot set up for him next to mine. We stayed awake a long time, talking.

In the morning, I had myself transferred to another squadron.

Dutch was the only one of the four that I ever spoke to afterward. We met in the operations office and he said he was sorry about the whole idiotic mess. They had picked up the money all right, and everyone had taken his share.

What Do You Do?

March, 1946

We had all decided that Karl Schiller was the best commanding officer any battalion of aviation engineers ever had when someone gave him a pair of eagles and assigned him to MacArthur's staff. Whoever was going to take us over had two strikes on him to begin with. I don't think a day passed, from New Guinea through Okinawa, that some junior officer didn't wish we had Karl back with us. The new man, Ruffin, assumed command at Nadzab and took his third strike at once. He got us together in the officer's mess and delivered his inaugural.

"I might as well tell you what they called me in Australia," he said. "They called me Rough Ruffin. I'm out for results and I'll chew on you till I get them. Going over the records here, I see some of you are graduate engineers. I'm not going to hold that against you. Myself, I happen to be a plain, old-fashioned contractor from the State of Alabama. In my time, though, I've hired and fired plenty of men with degrees from M.I.T. So I'm not an easy man to impress. That don't mean I can't *be* impressed. I can. But it'll have to be by results, more results, and still more results. You'll find me tough and fair. Who's the best construction man here?" He seemed to be looking at me.

"Lieutenant Holt," I said.

"I'll want a word with you, Holt," said Ruffin. "Who's the best all-around shot in the outfit?"

"Captain Green, maybe," Dick Holt said.

"No, I want a private."

"There's a kid in my platoon," I said. "Farley. I've seen him hit a bird at a hundred yards or more."

"Send him in," said Ruffin. "That's all for now, gentlemen."

We went about our business, but most of us had our eyes open as his gear was moved into the battalion area. You can tell a lot by the gear a man carries, and Ruffin did turn up with a couple of unusual items. He had a beautiful and well-kept Doberman pinscher named Champ, and a Servel refrigerating unit, kerosene-operated and in perfect condition. It was twice the size of the ordinary domestic type, and we spent a good part of the Pacific war trying to figure out how and where he had promoted it.

The same afternoon, Ruffin had his shack enlarged. That was what he wanted Dick Holt for. Before long he had the best quarters of anyone in Nadzab, with a bed for Champ and an extension for Private Farley. He appointed Farley to be his personal bodyguard and supplied him with a Thompson submachine gun, a pistol, a carbine, a shotgun, and a trench knife. The boy, who at once became known as Fearless Farley, was never without at least two of these weapons. He and Champ went with Ruffin everywhere. A curious setup, because Nadzab had been secure for months. Our only hazards were strafing runs by small formations of Jap fighters.

The one time we had to take a raid in force, our warning system failed. The alert didn't sound until very shortly before the first Zekes appeared. I ran as far as I could away from the buildings and found a good hole in the open field. I didn't know Ruffin had followed me until he landed on the small of my back. He was a heavy man, but I can't say I minded the weight. Matter of fact, I liked the idea of something solid between me and the sky. Nothing hit anywhere near us.

When the raid was over, we walked back to the battalion area together. Ruffin had bruised his knee on a rock, and one of the medics gave him a treatment. Steve Bishop, our doctor, was busy taking a fragment out of Pfc Brand's shoulder.

In the evening, Steve came into the tent I shared with Dick Holt. "What do you think Lieutenant Colonel Ruffin just pulled?" he said. "He tried to get me to recommend him for a Purple Heart."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Hell, no."

"Did you tell him?"

"Sure, I told him. You should have heard our boy citing chapter and verse about wounds in action and how he'd received treatment and all that. Thank God there's one regulation I've read. It's the medical officer who decides whether he's going to recommend a man or not. I recommended Brand, and nuts to Lieutenant Colonel Ruffin."

"There goes your efficiency rating," Dick said. "*And* your promotion."

Dick was right. Ruffin started in on Steve and never did let up, not until Okinawa. He had plenty to go on, of course. You can always find fault with medical inspection, particularly of food and latrines, and Ruffin threw the book at Steve. He had memorized more field manuals than Steve had ever opened, and he could press an advantage as well as the next lieutenant colonel. Steve remained a first lieutenant until the last months of the war, and so did Dick, to whom a promotion would have meant a great deal more. Ruffin's grudge against Dick started on Biak.

Dick should have been put in for captain a long time before that. He was good, he had time in grade, and his job as company commander called for double bars. Aside from all that, he wanted to be a captain because Kathy's brother was one, and what would Kathy think?

Eight of Kathy's pictures hung in our tent. Kathy was beautiful, talented, faithful, and loving. Kathy could cook. Kathy dressed better than that other Kathy, Hepburn, and Kathy could play tennis as well as Alice Marble. Kathy could swim. She could swim like a barracuda. And she could come out of the pool looking as well as she did before going in. She wrote two letters on Sunday and one every weekday. If you ever want to know any more about Kathy, ask me; I lived in the same tent with Dick for twenty months.

I can also tell you about Joey, Ruffin's twelve-year-old son. He, too, wrote frequently, and it was something about one of his letters that started the trouble on Biak. Mail had just come in after a long delay and we were all sitting around opening envelopes. Ruffin began to chuckle. Then he laughed. He had a deep and, I must say, quite pleasant laugh. He slapped his thigh and said, "Listen to this. Letter from Joey. He says, 'I took that native bracelet to school and Miss Keller said what an artistic bracelet but it didn't help my marks none because I got forty-five on the mid-terms in geography.' That kid's a riot. Then he goes on—but let me read you the whole thing. 'Dear Dad,' he says—"

"Why don't you save it for later, Colonel?" said Dick. "We're all trying to get at our own mail here."

"All right," Ruffin said. "Just as you please." He was badly hurt. He finished Joey's letter in silence and walked off.

"And there goes *your* promotion," Steve said.

After that, Dick went right to the top of Ruffin's list. In a way, I suppose the outfit benefited by this, because Dick was doubtless the best man for the nasty, tough jobs Ruffin started to throw at him. As it became obvious that Ruffin was not going to put through a promotion, Dick dropped all semblance of common, not to say military, courtesy. In contrast to Steve's weary politeness, he took to refuting Ruffin's strictures in monstrously recondite technical jargon that would often leave the Colonel only the ritual of muttering about the M.I.T. men he had hired and fired in his time.

"M.I.T.?" Dick once said. "What about Cal Tech? Have you ever fired any Cal Tech men, Colonel?"

There were nights when Dick and I, sitting awake, would permit ourselves to feel a little sorry for our boss. We had to do that not only as a measure of compensation but because Ruffin, from time to time, would show an inordinate and helpless craving to be liked. He would refer to himself as the Old Man, or Old Rough and Ready, on the naïve presumption that the battalion also thought of him in those terms. He'd talk about Joey with indulgence and deep love. "I don't want him to have to hustle for a buck like the old man. This cockeyed world owes at least a few people a good life, and I hope he's one of them."

At the same time, we'd know that, just the day before, he had scrounged two big hams off the Navy, that he had cans of crabmeat, chicken, and sardines nestling in the ineffable Servel, and that no one besides himself, his executive, and occasionally Fearless, would ever get a whiff of them. He grumbled even about letting us have a few ice cubes for drinks. It got so we determined never to ask him for any, and all the time we were on Biak we violated our pact only once or twice. It wasn't easy to be proud about ice cubes on Biak.

Maybe I'm not being altogether fair about those hams. Ruffin did give away a really large slice one day to a small native boy whom Steve Bishop had virtually adopted. Steve had trained the child to report to one or the other of the officers' tents each morning, hold his hand out, and say, "No father, no mother, no sister, no flying pay. Got some gum, chum?" That was what he must have said to Ruffin, and he got a generous slice of ham for his pains.

"I don't know," Steve said. "Could be the guy is a soft touch for kids."

Ruffin was no soft touch the time he tangled with Dick on Morotai. For a moment there I thought Ruffin would ask for a court-martial.

Our company had just put a road through to the beach. It hadn't been much of a job. All that remained to be done was the grading on a short stretch that began at the sand. Dick and I had promised the beachmaster we wouldn't run a grader in until he had a chance to clear the area. The man had been handed as messed-up a sector as I've seen. He had hot cargo piled in dozens of unidentified heaps, and another convoy was scheduled to unload shortly. Dick and I hung around and tried to give him what help we could. Brand, the man who'd been hit at Nadzab, sat on top of our big grader, waiting for us to get done.

Ruffin came down with Fearless and a bird colonel from the regimental staff.

"What's holding you up?" he asked.

Dick told him.

"That's the beachmaster's headache," Ruffin said. "If he needs help, let him get it from his own chief. Your job is to push a road through. What's that man doing on top of the grader?"

"He's waiting for orders," said Dick.

"Well, issue them. I've told you a hundred times you're to keep the equipment rolling. Everything else can wait. There you got a piece of idle equipment and a man sitting on top of it. Look at him. Look at him squatting up there with a cigar in his mouth like he owned this beach. How's he going to have any respect for you if you work while he sits by? You got to handle these men, Holt, handle them. Ream their tails out. Prove to them you're the better man, no matter what. No matter if you got to do it with a length of pipe. I want to see you handle that man."

"Now?" Dick asked.

"Yes, now."

Dick didn't know what he meant any more than I did. Perhaps he was just sounding off for the bird colonel's benefit. Brand continued to sit on top of his grader. He outweighed Dick by a good hundred pounds. The wound he'd got at Nadzab had healed up in a matter of weeks. Brand was a full-blooded Sioux, and he had wrestled professionally under the name of Chief Cloudburst.

"Brand, come down off that grader," Dick said.

Brand got down and took the cigar out of his mouth. He never lit his cigars, just chewed on them through the day.

"I'll show you who's boss around this beach," Dick said. "Brand, I'm going to give you a beating."

"Yes, sir." Brand was fine. His face had no expression at all.

Dick stepped over to him, took his right arm, and twisted it gently around and up his back. Brand held onto his cigar.

"You give up?" Dick said.

"Yes, sir."

"Say uncle."

"Uncle."

"All right, then. You climb back up there and start grading."

Brand climbed back and started working his grader. The bird colonel laughed. But then he saw that Ruffin was angry and thought he'd ease things by walking away with the beachmaster.

"Clown all you like, Holt," Ruffin said. "But when I say keep the equipment rolling, I mean just that." He went away, too.

I knew then there would be no court-martial, or even an administrative reprimand. Not after that colonel had laughed. Ruffin had no case, anyway. He took it out by making Dick officer of the day and inviting the rest of us to a party in his tent.

Steve and I considered not going. But we went. Cold drinks were cold drinks on Morotai as well as on Biak. Ruffin had a jug of coke syrup and made us some good Cuba Libres. We drank quietly and no one said anything about the humiliation of Chief Cloudburst.

At ten o'clock, Dick came in, followed by Champ. "You better keep this dog in here," he said. "One of the guards might take a shot at him."

"Here, Champ," said Ruffin. "Farley usually has him tied up at this hour. But you don't have to worry about old Champ. I'd bet on him against any of your jittery guards."

Ruffin had long maintained that Champ was a very tough customer. I can't tell why he chose to think so. Champ was a pretty dog, and friendly, but someone had long ago broken his spirit.

"You'd lose your money, Colonel," said Dick. "Champ wouldn't mix it with a mouse. Try him. Try sicking him on me."

"I wouldn't do that. He'd tear you apart."

"Bull. That's a biscuit dog there if ever I saw one. Try putting him on a leash and sick him on me then. There're enough of us to stop him. But I don't think we'd have to."

"Very well," Ruffin said. "You asked for it." He put Champ on a long leash and wound the strap around his wrist.

Dick stood in the doorway and smiled at me. I wondered if it weren't a fool stunt. Maybe we didn't know Champ as well as we thought we did. I walked around the cot to be near a pistol that hung on the wall. I decided to shoot Champ if the strap should fail to hold.

"Are you ready?" Ruffin asked.

"I'm ready," Dick said. "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

"All right." Ruffin leaned down and stroked the dog between the ears. "Get him," he said sharply. "Get him, Champ."

Champ didn't move.

Ruffin rapped on the table with his knuckles. He pointed to Dick. "Get him. Get him," he said.

Champ sat down. Then Dick raised both his arms high and began to walk toward the dog. He distorted his face and suddenly screamed. Champ let out a terrified yap and ran between his master's legs to the back of the tent. It was all Ruffin could do to keep from tumbling over.

We laughed. We laughed and yelled and pounded on each other. The cot fell down, and one of the men had to lie on it because his side hurt from laughing. Champ cowered behind a barracks bag. Steve lost an inlay, he never knew how. Even Ruffin laughed. Long after Dick had left, some of us would go off into spasms.

It wasn't until Leyte that Ruffin's faith in Champ found partial vindication. While firing was still going on in the hills, Champ went out and came trotting back with a beautiful knife. It had the name and rank of a Japanese major carved into the ivory handle and it became the pride of Ruffin's collection. Champ, I suspect, had mistaken it for a bone. The prize inflamed Ruffin's passion for souvenirs and he began to lay out money for all sorts of gadgets.

It was odd that someone as shrewd and efficient in providing for his personal needs should have been so regularly cheated by young infantrymen with knickknacks for sale. The fact that Joey was involved may have had a little to do with it. Each of Ruffin's acquisitions was lovingly labeled and at once sent off to Alabama. If Joey was not the most popular boy in town, he had only himself to blame. From Okinawa he got a samurai sword that even I could tell had been faked out of an automobile spring.

Okinawa was our bad show. We built one new strip under fire and made three beat-up ones operational. Our bulldozers kept breaking down, and the Kamikazes undid some of our hardest work. We had to lend Steve Bishop to a line outfit that had taken fifty-per-cent casualties and needed medical help. He didn't come back until we'd been sent to the rear, supposedly for rest. They called the place a rehabilitation area, but it was just another airfield.

When Steve rejoined us, he looked bad. He had performed some unbelievable number of amputations, and General Buckner had promoted him in the field. "Bishop," said Ruffin, "I'm putting you in for a Bronze Star." At that point on Okinawa, a Bronze Star meant you were a nice boy who just didn't happen to have it. If we'd been a shade less tired, we would probably have laughed.

Of the officers, Dick alone still had energy. Working with a sergeant named Melnick, he set up a sawmill that kept half the Army sector in lumber and got us some fine meals in exchange for two-by-fours. Dick and I built ourselves decent quarters, every bit as good as Ruffin's. The only thing his shack had on ours was the refrigerator.

Dick's sawmill catapulted us into the big time. The airfield was then handling a little of A.T.C.'s overflow traffic, and you could always earmark a few items if you had lumber to trade. We did some first-rate scrounging.

A few days after the fall of Naha, we got word that the airfield was expecting a large shipment of tools. Dick and I went over and hung around, just in case. But nothing came through until dusk, and then it was a formation of six Betties headed for our strip.

The first I knew, our anti-aircraft batteries had opened up on them. I was in the tower and could see nearly everything. The formation came in low. Three of the Betties were shot down almost simultaneously at three o'clock from me. Two made crash landings at the far end of the strip, and the last one came to a careful stop right in front of the tower. I was so stupefied I don't remember a sentence of the instructions being shouted at my side. Two-engine medium bombers, I thought. Who's in them?

The Japanese from the two crash-landed Betties went running toward the machine shop. The crew of the other Betty joined them. There were perhaps forty of them, all told. Our batteries couldn't fire any more for fear of hitting our own people, and the rest of us just stood there like imbeciles while the Japs made a football huddle in front of the machine shop. They were in that huddle ten or fifteen seconds before scattering.

Our first shots were fired by three men who came out of a tent. I didn't know it then, but among them was Dick. He emptied his pistol and killed one of the Japs and then they killed him. The other two men, both visiting Marines, got away safely. The Japanese were not interested in people. Their orders had obviously been to work on the airplanes, and they did an extraordinary job. They threw grenades and set fires all around the field and down at the hard stands. I even saw one of them slashing at a tire. After Dick had fired, of course everyone else started shooting, and since the Japanese made no great effort to defend themselves, most of them were quickly killed. Only six or eight managed to run off. It was dark by then and there would not have been much point in trying to track them down. They couldn't get far, anyway. They had completely ruined nine airplanes and damaged twelve. We had three men wounded and one dead.

In the morning, Ruffin helped to organize the rabbit hunt. He was very martial about it, helmet and all. We found some of the Japanese hiding in a culvert and the rest in an old half-buried dugout. Both places were cleared by grenade. The thing I remember most clearly is that the clothing had been blown off one of the bodies. It turned out to have been a woman. Fearless couldn't take his eyes off her. "So that's what they look like," he said twice. He was nineteen years old, and the only other naked women he'd seen were natives. Drained of blood, the Japanese corpse looked white.

I had to go back to my quarters and write Kathy. Dick had once told me that if anything happened, he wanted her to get the straight version.

We were still on Okinawa when the war ended. Steve heard the announcement on his radio and he came running to me. By then others had also picked it up, and artillery was beginning to go off all over the island. The celebration cost our side more than a hundred casualties. No one got hurt in the battalion, though. The officers crowded into Ruffin's shack and everybody talked at once.

"You're sure it's no gag?" asked Ruffin.

"It couldn't be."

"As I live and breathe," he said. "This calls for a drink. Will you gentlemen have Scotch, rye, or bourbon?" He had them all. It was the first time some of the new men had seen the inside of his refrigerator.

Fearless brought cups and Ruffin filled them.

"Gentlemen, a toast," he said. "I drink to Lieutenant Dick Holt."

What do you do about people like that? Nothing, I guess.

Pro and Con

September, 1945

Charlie had meant to mull things over on the train up home. Passing through Poughkeepsie, he took a piece of paper and drew a line down the middle. He had meant to write out all the arguments, pro and con. He had the pencil in his hand, but all he did was think about how the people would be at Boulton, what Mr. Van Kleeck would say, what the old cottage looked like.

With the war over and all, Charlie might have put in for an immediate discharge, especially since he'd been a prisoner of war. But he didn't know whether he wanted one or not. There were any number of things to consider. He had no family responsibilities. A first lieutenant's salary, plus flying pay, looked good. Somewhere in the neighborhood of four thousand a year. In civilian life, you'd have to go some to make that. You'd be a lot safer, of course. Engines could quit on you just as easily in peacetime. And how much, for instance, was a leg worth? You had to figure on all that.

Charlie had two more weeks to decide in. Then his leave would be up and he'd have to put down whether he wanted a regular commission or what. Roy Huddleston now, his old squadron commander, had not hesitated a minute. Roy wanted to fly jets. Right at this moment he was on his way to the Coast with orders to report for transition training. With twenty-two destroyed and four probables, Roy would be a cinch for the regular Air Force. Charlie wished there was something he wanted as badly as Roy wanted to fly jets. But all he could do, here on the train, was think about Boulton.

Boulton was where Charlie had spent the first eighteen years of his life. A lot of men in Stalag Luft 3 had raised eyebrows when Charlie told them that twelve thousand acres of the best Dutchess County land belonged to Mr. Van Kleeck, but that was because everyone told lies in the Army. Well, they could look it up. Twelve thousand acres it was, whether they believed it or not.

It made the President's place at Hyde Park look like pretty small potatoes, Charlie used to say. The Big House, where Mr. Van Kleeck himself lived, had twenty-three bathrooms, and at least one of the bathtubs was the size of a young swimming pool. There were two real swimming pools, one indoors and one out. You could swim in the lake, though, if you wanted to. The lake also belonged to Mr. Van Kleeck and they had on it everything from canoes and sailboats to a specially built motor launch. It would probably fill a book just to list the things on the estate, the tennis courts and ski runs, the glasshouses, orchards, stables, hunting lodge, anything you wanted. In the old days, when Mrs. Van Kleeck was still living, there'd be as many as a hundred guests on some weekends. Now it was different. A lot of the place was hardly kept up. Mr. Van Kleeck was nearly blind and over eighty. Even his son, Mr. Eugene, was over fifty and the only thing that interested *him* was birds. He had bookcases filled with nothing but books about birds, and he spent most of the day walking in the woods to see what the birds were up to. And the grandson, Mr. Joe, he had no interest in keeping up the place, either. All he cared about was ballet dancers, male. He once even tried to convert the east barn into a summer theatre, but Mr. Van Kleeck put a stop to that. Mr. Joe was anyway six foot four and as healthy a specimen as you'd find in the Army, but he'd been turned down cold at the induction center.

Charlie's father had been in charge of the orchard, the herb garden, and the grounds of the Big House. There had been a vague understanding that complete management of the grounds was going to be turned over to Charlie in time. Mr. Van Kleeck was going to send him through agricultural school and then Charlie was going to come back and take over. It looked like a good deal. The cottage was a nice place to live in. Charlie's mother had fixed it up, so there were a lot of weekend people who'd stand around and say it was the prettiest house on the place. But then she had died and the cottage was never the same again. And with Charlie's being drafted and his father's dying, too, all within a month, everything got loused up. After four years of the Army, a man didn't feel like returning to school. Way back in preflight training, Charlie had sworn he'd never sit in another classroom if he could help it.

There'd been talk that Charlie's father had figured in Mr. Van Kleeck's will, but nothing specific to go by. That was one of the things Charlie meant to look into. He didn't know just how. You couldn't up and ask Mr. Van Kleeck. Mr. Eugene wouldn't have any idea, and Mr. Joe was hardly ever around. Miss Jennie, the housekeeper, might have heard something, but she'd keep it to herself. She had never had much use for Charlie's father.

Now, on the train to Boulton, Charlie sat in a parlor-car chair, looking at a piece of paper. There was nothing on it except a line down the middle. At the top he wrote "Reasons for staying in the Army—Pro and Con." He remembered that before this the only way he had traveled between Boulton and New York was by coach and he felt pretty good about sitting in a parlor car. It was funny how the other people in the chairs were either middle-aged or old. In coaches, people were younger and many of them were in uniform. In this car, Charlie was the only service man, and all the gaffers took at least one look at his ribbons. Most of these monkeys probably couldn't tell the difference between a theatre ribbon and the Silver Star. But six ribbons were something, all the same, and it made Charlie feel good to have people look at them. Among yourselves, you made fun of the ribbons, but here in the sticks it was different. Even in New York they meant something.

At the Boulton station, for a moment Charlie felt as if he'd never been away. He felt that the cart of the express company had not been moved an inch from its usual position at the head of the platform. There was the same face under the same green visor at the window and the same summer people waiting in the cars and the same Buick station wagon with "Van Kleeck" lettered on its door. Everything was the same—the houses, the lawns, the trees, the road, everything.

A gray-haired man and a boy got out of the station wagon. "I'm Harry Clayton," the man said, "and this is my son they call Young Harry." Clayton was the gardener now and lived in the cottage. "We fixed up your old room just about the way you had it," he said. "The boy's been using it."

"I wouldn't like anybody to put themselves out," said Charlie.

"This is the Silver Star," Young Harry said, "and this is the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with clusters, the Good Conduct, the European Theatre, and the pre-Pearl Harbor. I got a collection of insignia. I'm the only one that's got the shoulder patch of the Yankee Division from the other war. My father was a corporal and my Uncle Earl was a pfc. Bill Kraber over in town is a tech sergeant and he's got the Bronze Star."

"Is Bill Kraber back?" said Charlie. "I used to go to school with him."

"He told us," Young Harry said. "He said he wouldn't salute you and see what you said."

"Why, I'll have him busted down so fast it'll make his head spin."

"Will you?"

"He's only kidding," Clayton said to the boy.

"Bill Kraber escaped from *his* prison camp," Young Harry said. "He said you had to wait for the infantry to get you out."

"I guess that's right," said Charlie.

"How many credits you got?"

"Three in the air and one on the ground."

"Major Bong had forty," Young Harry said. "But the Japs weren't so tough."

"You talk too much," said Clayton.

The cottage was all different inside, but the Claytons were good people, you could see that. Mrs. Clayton served a big lunch, most of it right out of the garden. She was quick and talkative where Charlie's mother had been slow and quiet. While they were eating dessert, she hung up all of Charlie's uniforms. And after lunch, Charlie gave the boy a pair of his old second lieutenant's bars. Then he went to call on Mr. Van Kleeck. Miss Jennie took him in.

Mr. Van Kleeck looked the way he had always looked to Charlie; long and old and held together by wires. Charlie had to come within a yard of him because Mr. Van Kleeck liked to see people's faces.

"We're very proud of you," he said. "You've done us honor."

Charlie stood at a kind of parade rest until Mr. Van Kleeck asked him to sit down. It was the first time he had ever sat down in the Big House.

"Were they hard on you at the prison camp?"

"Not so hard, sir," Charlie said. "The men had it a lot more rugged at some other places."

"I hear von Mackensen is still hale and hearty."

Whoever that is, Charlie thought. He said nothing. You couldn't tell when Mr. Van Kleeck was looking at you through those glasses. The fireplace was big enough to roast an ox in.

"Things have changed here a little," Mr. Van Kleeck said.

"Clayton's not the man your father was. The orchard has had some setbacks and you can see the grounds for yourself. The herb garden has held its own, held its own. I put in more samphire and basil this year and there is some Good-King-Henry coming up. You might take a look."

"I'd like to."

Mr. Van Kleeck clasped his long brown hands. "There will always be a place for you here," he said.

"Thank you, sir."

"Mr. Eugene will be told that. Always a place."

Mr. Van Kleeck asked some questions about airplanes. He seemed to think that Charlie had flown a B-17 and Charlie explained the difference between fighters and bombers. Nothing was said about the will or what Charlie's salary would be. You never talked about things like that with Mr. Van Kleeck. You were expected to take it for granted that everything would be satisfactory, and in the old days everything was. Money came up now only when Mr. Van Kleeck asked how much a P-47 cost. Charlie had been shot down in one. He guessed it cost about seventy thousand dollars.

Miss Jennie came in, perhaps to indicate that the talk had lasted long enough. There was no change in Mr. Van Kleeck's expression, and he said nothing when Charlie stood up. And all Miss Jennie said on the way out was "You look more like your father every year." She was certainly not the one to ask about money.

In the afternoon, Charlie looked up Mr. Eugene, who lived a mile from the Big House. Mr. Eugene's place was much smaller. All he needed was room for his stuffed birds and cameras. Mrs. Eugene, whom very few people remembered, had come and died all within a year, just long enough to produce Mr. Joe. The only people who lived with Mr. Eugene now were the help and Metcalf, his taxidermist.

Mr. Eugene had grown older. He was tall, like all the Van Kleecks, and thin, too, like his father. He used to give Charlie a quarter for locating nests. He was working on a nest now, getting it ready for Metcalf.

"I will show you some drawings by Leonardo da Vinci," he said. "You'll be interested in his plans for flying machines and the aerodynamic principles he derived from ornithological studies. In return, I will ask you to tell me a little about the sensations of flying. My doctor has refused to let me go up."

"It's hard to describe," Charlie said.

"Do you like it?"

"I like it once I'm up there. Getting into the cockpit, I sometimes wonder whether the thing will fly, but once I'm off I feel all loosened up and rarin' to go."

"Sense of exhilaration?"

"You could call it that. In combat, it's more like you're driving into a traffic circle with cars coming at you from every direction. You don't think about anything except your guns and what the other guy is going to do."

"That's very interesting," Mr. Eugene said. "You'll have to tell me more. You left just about the time we had the dam finished, didn't you?"

"About."

For two years in a row, the ducks hadn't come back to the big lake, and the Van Kleecks had decided to create another lake by damming up the stream. It was supposed that the ducks had been frightened off by the noise of the motor launch, and Mr. Eugene had a notion they would return if they found a new body of water.

"It worked," said Mr. Eugene. "The ducks are back and we've acquired quite a respectable colony of green herons, *Butorides virescens.* I'd be happy to have you come with me to see them."

"I'd like to do that sometime," Charlie said.

They forgot to look at the drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, but they examined a roomful of Metcalf's work, and Mr. Eugene asked a few questions about English birds. There was no opening for Charlie to inquire about how much the Van Kleecks intended to pay him.

Later in the afternoon, Charlie caught sight of Mr. Joe at the head of the bridle path and he thought, Maybe this joker will give me an idea. How can a man make up his mind about a job if he doesn't know what the work is or what they intend to pay?

Mr. Joe was at the wheel of a convertible, trying to get it started.

"This damn thing won't kick off," he said. "How've you been, Charlie?"

He was the tallest of all the Van Kleecks and husky, too. Charlie had never seen much of him. He had always been at school or in Europe. He'd even been in Java to study the native dances. Still and all, you'd think he'd have more to say to someone just back from Germany. He looked sore as a boil about not being able to get the car started. He ran that battery for a minute at a time.

The battery sounded good. Charlie said he thought it might be just that the car had been sitting on a slope and the carburetor needed priming. Mr. Joe hollered for one of the stablehands and made him bring a can of gas. Sure enough, priming did the trick.

"Talk about coming in the nick of time," Mr. Joe said. "First you go off and save our country and then you get back just in time to save my life. I've got fourteen minutes to make that train."

He drove off and left Charlie talking to the stablehand, a new man.

"We don't see much of Mr. Joe," the man said. "Far as he's concerned, these horses could stay in their stalls all year."

Charlie had dinner at the Claytons', and Mrs. Clayton was some cook, all right. His mother, good as she had been, could never have put on a spread like that. Mrs. Clayton had a soup, made out of Mr. Van Kleeck's herbs, that was better than anything Charlie had eaten in New York. Young Harry drank the last of it from his plate. So what?

Clayton had a deaf ear. He'd fought in the last war, seen some pretty rough going, but, he told Charlie, that wasn't where the ear got hurt. Injured while he was trying to fix a combine down in Texas. You never knew.

They sat on the porch and looked over Young Harry's collection of insignia. Charlie added some ribbons and a miniature silver bar, one of those things you couldn't wear in the States. He had to tell the Claytons about getting shot down from formation and bailing out this side of Düsseldorf. They wanted to know about Roy Huddleston, who had the Congressional, and if Red Cross packages had got through to the prisoners, and what General Eisenhower was like. Charlie had once seen General Eisenhower at a theatre in London.

The country looked like a million dollars. There must have been thirty shades of green in the hills. A young chipmunk kept going in and out of its burrow. When you kept quiet, all you could hear was the brook under the willows and a hummingbird.

Charlie thought, Oh, Christ, this is the place. He wondered if he'd be expected to live with the Claytons. He couldn't think of anything more pleasant. Money didn't mean a thing out here. Suppose Mr. Van Kleeck offered him only room and board and maybe eighty a month? What, after all, was there to spend on here? Charlie's father had never got more than a hundred and he managed to save about a half of it, with a family and all. Agricultural school was out, though. No more classroom work for yours truly.

In the evening, Clayton and Charlie drove over to Boulton. This Clayton was a nice guy, quiet. Charlie told him his problem, but Clayton said nothing. He seemed to be one of these fellows who mulled things over before he offered advice. Charlie liked that.

They stopped in for malteds and, before you knew it, the drugstore was in full swing, practically everybody there. Bill Kraber showed up, and just like he'd said, he refused to salute. They had some kidding back and forth about the Air Force getting flying pay and the dogfaces having to get them out of prison. Bill Kraber had a lot on the ball, and with any kind of breaks he would have got to be an officer, but the drugstore wasn't the place to concede that. So Charlie said the Bronze Star came in Cracker Jack boxes, and all you had to do to stay alive in the infantry was to keep your arches from falling.

Most of the girls who had grown up with Charlie had left town for one reason or another. Some of them had got married and many had moved to East Hawley with their families. There was a chemical plant in East Hawley, still going at capacity and no cutbacks in sight. Half the girls that Charlie asked about worked there. But a new crop had come along and they looked, if anything, better. They wore their hair up, like summer people. They swished in and out of the drugstore and gave Charlie the once-over as if they'd been the guys and he the dish. A uniform with brag rags, wings, and silver bars will do it every time. "You'll kill 'em," said Bill.

Charlie didn't want to kill 'em, but he certainly thought he could do with a little of the stuff. This was what you talked about at Stalag Luft 3—stuff hanging from low branches and begging to be picked. The one called Willa had almost surely been picked before, and Clayton would probably not mind lending his Chevy. There was no more gas rationing and you wouldn't have to drive far, not in those hills.

No, you wouldn't get rich on the Van Kleeck place, but that kind of job was nothing to sneeze at. With the war plants all folding, people would be giving their eyeteeth for something as solid as that. You wouldn't catch the Van Kleeck place folding, if the old man had to live to be a hundred. Even Mr. Eugene would always want some woods to operate in. Half the money in the world belonged to Van Kleecks. And there just wasn't any prettier country in the universe. England was pretty in the springtime, but you couldn't find a double vanilla malted in the whole U. K.

Charlie felt good. He would have sat there drinking malteds for a long time if Clayton hadn't got up to go. Clayton said he had to be at work fairly early and wanted to be in bed by ten.

They drove back in the darkness, and the night air was like nothing else at all.

"Think you might take that job?" Clayton asked.

"I might."

"You could do a lot worse. If you can please Mr. Van Kleeck about the herbs and the orchard, you won't have to look for another job in his lifetime."

"I think I could. My father was the best gardener in this county and he used to go out of his way to teach me."

"I wish someone had taught me," Clayton said. "I'm a grain farmer myself. Never could give satisfaction to Mr. Van Kleeck. I figure he'll move me out when you come in."

"He wouldn't do that."

"Yes, he would. It's a one-man job. He knows that."

"Hell, I wouldn't want him to move you out," said Charlie. "It's your job, not mine."

"Just as much yours. Maybe more. Your father's put a lot into the place."

"What would you do if you did get moved out?"

"I don't know," Clayton said. "I don't figure these legs of mine would stand up much longer in the fields. I could still go over and find something in East Hawley, maybe. They're still hiring at the plant there."

"I wouldn't like to see you do that. I don't think Mrs. Clayton would like it there, or Young Harry, either."

"They can make do."

Charlie didn't feel so good any more. The night air still blew soft and cool against his face, but it didn't feel so good any more. It was true, Mr. Van Kleeck had not spoken highly of Clayton's work, but that didn't necessarily mean he'd let him go. Not necessarily.

Hell, Charlie didn't need anybody's job. There was no use elbowing an old man for eighty a month. It might even be as low as sixty and Mr. Van Kleeck might just as easily take it into his head to insist on agricultural school. That was out. No more classroom work for yours truly. No more examinations. After eleven hundred hours in the air, a man didn't feel like memorizing formulas. Call it laziness, if you want to.

Charlie's tropical-worsted uniform had just recently been pressed. There wasn't a crease on it out of place. Over Germany, he'd been shot down in a pair of coveralls and he'd worn them in the prison camp for months. Clothes didn't make the man, but there was no use giving up tropical worsteds for a pair of clodhopper's overalls. If Mr. Joe could give you the brushoff in a first lieutenant's uniform, he wouldn't so much as look at you in the garden, trimming hedges. Why, the ignorant bastard didn't know enough to prime a carburetor. What was to keep him from bringing his car around to the orchard next year and saying, "Give 'er a grease job, Lieutenant"? He probably wouldn't do that, but he might.

Charlie had his mind made up. In the morning, he would write to Roy and ask about the chances of getting assigned to a jet group. Roy could fix it if anybody could. There were a lot of fliers trying to get into jets, but the brass would listen to Roy. Jets were no tougher than any other airplane. Faster, that's all.

Major and Mrs. Fletcher

October, 1946

The kind of waste that surprised me so much at Lynnsford seems comparatively trivial now. But Lynnsford Field was my first station as an officer; my assignment came right after a period of fairly rigorous training; the truth is, I found the life far from disagreeable. It was pleasant to eat off tablecloths again and to get by on two hours' work a day. The majority of my colleagues got by on less than that.

The base had about two hundred officers, as many enlisted men, and eighty or ninety civilian employees. We were there as a result of the decentralization policy then chic in Washington. Some senator had made a speech about the size of the Army in the District of Columbia, and the Air Staff responded by farming out a number of minor outfits to near-by places like Lynnsford. Our commanding officer, a Colonel Huntziger, must have had some kind of directive but he never did try, except in a vague way, to tell us what to do. A few officers were kept busy signing requisitions and such, but the rest of us goofed around and liked it. Each Saturday night there was a dance at the Officers' Club.

Actually, I don't think the installation cost the people of the United

States more than two or three million dollars a year. The soldiers' barracks were cheap, flimsy buildings, and most of the men lived off the post anyway. The landing strips had to be lengthened to accommodate Colonel Huntziger's personal B-17, but there was plenty of labor to be hired around town. The air-sea rescue boat had been converted into a sort of yacht for the use of a few field-grade officers, an enterprise that kept several local tradesmen occupied and certainly did nothing to impair the efficiency of rescue drills in Lynnsford Bay; the alterations could not have run more than twenty thousand dollars.

As a rule, we had fifteen airplanes assigned to the base. We needed that many because half of our officers were fliers and they could not have drawn flying pay without spending their monthly four hours in the air. This sounds like more waste of government funds; the way it worked out, though, I got to visit several of the flying officers' relatives in states like California and New Hampshire. We were paid an extra seven dollars a day for being away from our station.

I have gone on like this about Lynnsford mostly to establish the fact that Major Arthur Fletcher was a remarkable man. He averaged easily twelve hours a day at his job.

His job was the improvement of the life raft carried by bombers and transports. No one had asked him to undertake this. There were other outfits working on the same problem but Arthur decided they were not very efficient. By stretching our directive he managed to set up a little branch of his own. It consisted of three sergeants who worked as hard as he did. Among them, they succeeded in having a number of improvements adopted. Arthur himself found a fluorescein dye that spread over a much larger area of water than the old one had —a rescue signal that proved useful in several cases. He also invented a special bullet hole plug for the dinghy, and remodeled the type of box kite used in floating the radio's antenna wire.

For months he traveled around the country, interviewing food authorities on the emergency ration. They gave him so much contradictory advice that he decided to set up a controlled experiment on nutrition in life rafts. He and his sergeants went out on Lynnsford

Bay in a dinghy and stayed there two weeks while a boatload of doctors and dieticians took notes. The sergeants spent some nights and days on board ship but Arthur stuck it out on his dinghy for the entire period. He was a heavy man and did not miss all of the twenty-eight pounds he lost. Among other things, he found out that one side of the tarpaulin was no good for catching rain water because the orange paint on it was soluble and mildly poisonous.

At first, there were some who distrusted all this activity. But it soon became apparent that Arthur was not bucking for anybody's job, and the lieutenant colonels stopped looking askance. As a matter of fact, Arthur's little branch was a godsend during the Air Inspector's visits. The Air Inspector, usually a new man, never stayed longer than a day or two, and the energetic Major Fletcher could be relied on to keep him busy most of the time. There was always work in progress at the Rescue Branch. The sergeants were fully imbued with Arthur's sense of dedication, and one could spend hours watching them demonstrate their gadgets. Inspectors left with the impression that Lynnsford Field in general was very much on the ball. The private bars that had been installed in the rescue boat and in Colonel Huntziger's B-17 were removable and easily kept out of sight.

Preoccupied as Arthur was with the life raft, he found time to follow an exceptionally wide range of interests. Before coming into the Army he had built bridges all over the Americas, and he kept up with engineering literature. In the house he rented on the outskirts of Lynnsford he had a collection of crystals, one of arrows and arrowheads, and trunks full of primitive mechanical devices. My ignorance of mechanics amused him. I sometimes pretended to know even less than I did, because he talked so well.

I remember a dissertation that followed an idle question I asked about the difference between single-leaf and double-leaf bascules. Arthur defined the cantilever principle; explained the difference between the Warren and the Pratt truss; listed a few battles that might have been won if someone had known a little more about bridge-building; told me why the Quebec Bridge had collapsed in 1907;

talked for half an hour about the Roeblings, father and son. Hegel, said Arthur, had students like Feuerbach, Marx, and Engels, but John Roebling, the designer of the Brooklyn Bridge, inventor of the steel cable, remained to the end his favorite pupil.

As Arthur talked, he would stride up and down the length of his big closed porch. I don't believe I've ever known anyone else who might have sustained that flow of information without sounding pedantic at some point or other. But he was so intense in his lust for precision, so eager to share all this knowledge he found fascinating, that the element of display, if present, was never obtrusive. We had long, violent arguments and loved each other dearly.

He came naturally enough by his crusader's zeal. His father was the founder of a Methodist mission in New Guinea where Arthur had spent most of his childhood and collected his first dozen arrowheads. When the Fifth Air Force moved into Hollandia, not far from his birthplace, he made a series of determined efforts to get assigned there. But Colonel Huntziger, who knew a good thing not long after he saw it, turned down the request every time. And the guiltier Arthur felt about not being overseas, the harder he worked at the life raft.

I spent several evenings a week at the Fletchers'. If I didn't show up for a few days in a row, either Arthur or Isabel would be certain to phone. After a while, Isabel started handling my ration points. She could make them go a long way; we often broiled steaks at the outdoor fireplace. I kept the fire going, Arthur mixed drinks and Isabel prepared salad while their boy, Jimmy, set the table. He was the kind of little boy I should like to have some day, bright and good-looking. He had inherited his father's mechanical gift and his mother's drawing ability. After nearly a year's work in the basement he came up with a scale model of Lynnsford Field, an elaborate construction that looked almost professional to me. Jimmy played the drums in his school orchestra.

At thirty-five, Isabel was probably more attractive than she had been as a young girl. I remember a snapshot of her, posed in the doorway of the Art Students League which she attended for a few months after Barnard. She was then what people call a mousy little blonde, I imagine. She must have outgrown that some time ago; certainly there was nothing of the mouse about Isabel in Lynnsford.

To be sure, Arthur usually struck people as more vivid, full as he always was of ideas and projects. He had done so many things and seemed on the point of doing so many more. But to me Isabel had always been a person in her own right. We had a great many fine dinners together, even with Arthur out of town.

I admired her sense of privacy. During our evenings alone she never discussed her relationship with Arthur, nor evinced curiosity about the girls I happened to be going with. One felt she was secure in the foundations of her own life, loved her husband and her son, and commented on other people's affairs mostly to discharge the office of a lively hostess. She could be extremely funny about the hectic goings-on among the officers' wives in Lynnsford. Without being involved in any of the major intrigues, she managed to keep an impressive fund of gossip on hand; Arthur and I relied on her to tell us why Huntziger was holding up certain promotions or what had been the true circumstances of Captain Brenner's brush with the Air Transport Command. Barney Brenner had tried, at ten thousand feet, to consummate a liaison with a Wave ensign who was not equal to the experience and passed out cold over the city of Atlanta.

Most of the officers' wives in Lynnsford would have grown fond of Isabel, if only because she painted such pretty watercolors of their children. "I might have been a decent commercial artist," she told me, "but I would have had to work at it a lot harder than I did. We were always moving around from bridge to bridge. Arthur earned enough for our needs." There was no tinge of regret in her voice. "Could you bear to sit for me some time?"

I never got around to that because in a week or so I was transferred out of Lynnsford. The Fletchers were the only people I was sorry to leave; we corresponded regularly for some months.

It was at Wright Field, from an Army dentist who seemed to know exactly how it happened, that I learned of Arthur's death. He had made a parachute jump over Lynnsford Bay to experiment on procedure for climbing into dinghies. He got tangled up in the strands of the parachute and drowned. The dentist had been home on a leave and had come through Lynnsford on the day of the funeral.

Arthur was the closest friend I lost in the war. There had been six others before him, but he was the one I thought about while my radio announced the terms of Japan's surrender. He had been the healthiest, and I think the kindest, and the one who had most enjoyed being alive. I wrote Isabel a short letter of condolence and tore it up.

Four months after his death, I had to take a trip to Lynnsford on Army business. It surprised me to hear that Isabel was still there, but one of the men explained that she didn't want to move Jimmy before the end of the school year. I was also surprised to see the kind of apotheosis Arthur had undergone at that sluggish and rather corrupt little post. His picture hung in several of the offices. Huntziger had put through posthumous awards of the Air Medal and the Legion of Merit. The town itself had erected a bronze tablet on the promontory overlooking the bay. And everyone at the Officers' Club remembered something remarkable Arthur had said the night before he made his bad jump.

The Officers' Club had got to be a very comfortable place. They had installed great soft-leather chairs and one of the best equipped bars in the state. After dinner I was violently greeted by Barney Brenner, the Wave-fancier.

"What's the good word?" he said.

I never know how to answer that. I said, "Hello, Barney. What have you been doing?"

"Trying to get sent back to China."

"What for?"

"Want to case the joint once more."

"What for?"

"That's where the big money's going to be after this war. You'll be able to go into China with a briefcase full of jackknives and come out with ten thousand dollars."

"Chinese dollars," I said.

"Chinese dollars, nothing. Why, those poor bastards haven't been able to buy manufactured goods for years. They'll snatch up anything you got. All I have to do is make a few more connections there and I'll be set. Huntziger's approved my orders but I still have to get an okay from Washington. Do you know what China is right this minute? It's a vacuum. And nature abhors a vacuum. Why, I could take a thousand dollars' worth of stuff in there just tucked away in my flight bag and run it up to ten thousand an hour after I step out of the plane."

"Sounds neat."

"I thought I'd wasted those three years of my life as a Fuller Brush Man," said Barney, "but a little sales technique will go a long way in China. Let me make a few more connections and I'll be dealing with Chancre Jack himself."

That was what they called Chiang Kai-shek in the Fourteenth Air Force. Barney was talking big but not so big as some might suppose. I know of one American major who, after two years in China, had saved enough of his salary to buy three motion picture theatres in Detroit. And in Lynnsford, where the flying officers ran off some really stiff poker games, Barney passed for a smooth operator. He was only a captain and his work had never been clearly defined, but he took a good bit of pride in having drawn more per diem than the hungriest of the colonels.

"Have you been to see Isabel yet?" he said.

"No."

"You ought to go out there. She thinks the world of you. And she knows you're in town. I told her."

"Is she pretty badly cut up?"

"She isn't hysterical, if that's what you mean. I'm driving to her place now. Do you want me to run you out?"

"All right," I said. "I was going to call her later."

Isabel was mixing herself a drink when we got there. We talked for an hour without mentioning Arthur. Jimmy was upstairs, asleep, and Isabel told us about a desperate crush he had on Colonel Huntziger's little girl; he had declined to run against her for class treasurer.

I wondered about the intimacy with which Barney moved around the house. He had no trouble finding a bottle of grenadine that Isabel said she had searched for all day. And without being asked, he went downstairs to stoke the furnace. In a way I was grateful for his being there because his presence created a degree of constraint and I had no wish to talk about Arthur; I would probably have felt called upon to say something appropriate and I didn't know what Isabel wanted to hear. When I stood up to go, Barney offered to drive me back to the hotel and I accepted.

"Great girl," he said in the car.

At the hotel I remembered I had meant to ask Isabel out to lunch the next day. I called back, and it was Barney who answered the telephone. He put her on. I asked her for lunch, and she said, "Can you make it dinner?" We arranged to meet in front of the post office.

She pulled up there in Arthur's old Chrysler. I started to get in at the right side, but she said, "Would you mind taking the wheel? I'm perfectly sober but I did have a few drinks and if some fool should run into us I don't want any policeman sniffing at my breath."

We drove down to the bay and found a table in a place called The Lobster. We were both hungry and ordered big meals.

"I suppose you think I'm having an affair with Barney Brenner," she said.

"Are you?"

"Yes."

She waited for me to say something and I waited for her to go on.

"Does that startle you?" she asked.

"A little."

"Why?"

"I don't like him much."

"I don't, either," said Isabel. "Not really. He does have a certain

. . . vitality. Are you sure there's a great deal of difference between one man and another?"

"No. You're not going to marry him, are you?"

"Heavens, no. I just wanted to see if I could . . . Well, he *has* had a lot of success with women. He's young and kind of venturesome. I just wanted to see if I could . . . I don't know. Is he so awful?"

"Pretty awful."

"I couldn't sleep for about a month after the funeral," she said. "Took all sorts of pills until the doctor made me stop. It's quite a business, I tell you. My whole life had been built around Arthur, more or less. This Barney business isn't anything at all."

She was looking at me steadily, and I had an irrelevant notion: I wondered if she'd be able to eat the lobster we ordered. I thought what a shame if we have to leave it.

"Look," she said, "have I ever showed you the things I painted at art school?"

"No."

"Well, they're not terribly interesting. I couldn't ever have been a serious painter. I might have become one of the decent commercial artists, though. Maybe I can go back to New York and pick up where I left off fourteen years ago—get a job if I can, go back to art school if I can't. We've enough money to live on for a few years. About this Barney thing, I guess it's the kind of foolish episode I should have had when I was twenty. I don't mean I went out of my way looking for it. He just made what must have been a routine pass for him and I happened to be available. He's not apt to pop up in New York and be a nuisance, is he?"

"I don't think so."

The waiter came over and said the lobsters would be ready in a minute.

"Basically," said Isabel, "perhaps I had as much talent in what might have been my field as Arthur had in his. But he knew how to organize his energies and I didn't. He had the drive and I had . . . what did I have? I had Jimmy to look after in Peru and Venezuela —anywhere we went."

"He's a wonderful boy."

"Isn't he? I know I'm not alone in thinking so. But in two years he'll be off to school and he won't need me except every now and then. If I didn't see things as clearly as I do, I'd probably become *his* appendage just as I used to be Arthur's. My God."

"I never thought of you as anybody's appendage."

"You wouldn't kid a pal," she said, "would you? Have you ever been in love with anyone who was much, much stronger than you?"

"Hard to say."

"I just don't exist without him. Oh, I was an appendage all right, though I never knew it. He moved from one bridge to the next and of course I went with him. It was the only sensible thing to do. You fall in love, you get married, and after that it's just one sensible thing after another. I'll never marry again. Never."

"You might."

I don't think she heard me.

"We were living in Peru near a town named Cuzco," she said. "Arthur went off on a three-day jaunt to trade for some arrowheads. The second day, Jimmy got sick and there wasn't a doctor I could trust within hundreds of miles. You might say how did Arthur know something would go wrong . . . All I mean is he always did what he wanted and I didn't. The devil of it was that the things he wanted were so reasonable."

It seemed as if she were trying, by a simple trick of mnemonics, to exorcise the presence of a great, irretrievable loss. She was seizing on all the invidious aspects of her life with Arthur, blowing them up out of all proportion. I thought she was going to cry, but she didn't.

The waiter brought our lobsters; they were beautifully done. It was a comfort to see Isabel go to work on hers. She certainly knew how to get the most out of a lobster. I told her about a good fish market I knew of in Brooklyn and we talked about the housing situation in Manhattan.

A year later, when I looked her up in New York, she had a neat little apartment on Gramercy Park and a good job drawing pictures for a company that printed catalogues. Jimmy liked his new school better than the one he had gone to in Lynnsford; a well-known bandleader had complimented him on the way he played the drums. There was a quiet Navy lieutenant in attendance, and his Bacardis were a great improvement over Barney's. He got out of the service almost immediately after V-J Day and then he married Isabel and took her off to live in Houston. He was the manager there, I think, of a large department store.

At First the Infant

THE MENTOCRATS

THE EAGLE

THE BRONZE THING

SEVENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS

CHOICE OF WEAPONS

EVER BEEN TO BROOKLYN?

THE WOLF

A COUPLE OF OLD-TIMERS

The Mentocrats

May, 1939

Benny Frankel was scrawny and very small, and he had the highest I.Q. in our high school freshman class. It must have been because he looked so much like a grind that he insisted he never did a lick of homework. He really did spend a good deal less time at it than most of the other topnotch students, and he told the truth when he said he never studied at home. He had to do his work at the library, because more often than not the gas was turned off in the basement room on Seventy-seventh Street where he lived with his mother, and they had to light the place with a candle. But even when they had gas the room looked pretty dismal. Benny's mother had a pushcart stand on Second Avenue and got home so late at night there seemed to be no point in making the beds. And everything was damp, from the walls to the worn oilcloth on the table. If I sat too long on a chair my trousers would stick to me moistly.

Mrs. Frankel sold fruits in season. She did not hawk her wares, because her voice was ineffectual. She just stood in front of the cart and waited for buyers to come. In the wintertime, she smashed up all the available crates and tried to keep a fire going in an ashcan. When the crates gave out she would peel off a sweater or two and wrap them around her ankles. Her wind-chapped red face made her look cold even during the warm months. All year round she was bundled into the same sweaters and shawls. Neither her clothes nor her face ever changed, and whenever we came by she asked Benny the same question: "Will you come help me clean around tonight?" And Benny would say, "You know damn well I'll come."

Once I bought a box of peaches from her, and she asked, "Benny a smart boy in school?"

"Oh, yes. Very."

"I know." She gave me my change. "Don't tell him I asked. I know he's smart."

Another time I passed the stand with Benny and bought an apple for three cents. Benny took the money out of her hand and gave it back to me.

"You're a friend of mine," he said.

I didn't want to take the apple for nothing and returned the three cents to Mrs. Frankel. He took the pennies out of her hand and threw them quickly into the gutter.

"He's my friend, I tell you," Benny said. "What do you take his money for?"

"I'm sorry. Don't holler on me like that."

We left her. At the corner I turned back and saw Mrs. Frankel searching for the pennies in the gutter. We walked up Seventy-ninth Street, not knowing where to go.

"What do you want to stay on that track team for?" said Benny. "What's the sense in it? You run back and forth, and where are you? In fifteen years you'll die of athlete's heart."

"I don't strain myself."

"That's not the idea. How can you stand being with those pinheads day after day? It's a wonder the morons manage to stay eligible."

But I was crazy about running and stayed with it, and eventually Benny gave me up in disgust. For a few weeks we scarcely talked to each other. It was John Atchison who told me of the stunt Benny pulled at the math contest against Stuyvesant High.

A dual meet of that sort is held between teams of five contestants who are given a set of algebra problems to be solved within a stipulated time limit. It occurred to Benny that if he could somehow distract the attention of the Stuyvesant team our side would have a great advantage. So he released a laboratory white mouse during the contest and it scampered up and down until the Stuyvesant boys went for it. Our team, who had been told what was going to happen, remained at work and won the meet.

Benny did not always need trickery to put over his triumphs. There was nothing fraudulent about the way he took the freshman medals in algebra, English and history. On the day of the awards I could not keep from going over to his locker to see those medals and feel them. John was with him.

"I'm glad you came," said Benny. "I got something to say to you."

"You suppose they're real gold?"

"What's the difference if they are?" he said, mildly. "Keep up with your track and one of these days you'll win a silver cup that'll be worth ten times as much as these."

I didn't quite know how to take him. "Is that what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"No, this is something important. Let's go where they can't hear us."

The three of us went to a stone bench on the campus.

"It's goofy, if you ask me," John said.

"So stay out of it if you think so. I'm not so sure I want you in on it anyway," Benny said.

"Well, go ahead, tell him."

"It's like this. Did you ever read *The Thirteen,* by Honoré de Balzac?"

"No."

"You want to," said Benny. "It's some book. All about thirteen guys who swore they'd stick together all their lives and help each other in every way possible. By the time they got through they were the most powerful organization in France. Just thirteen smart guys. I got the idea of getting up an outfit like that right here in New York, young guys like us. There's nothing we couldn't do if we worked it right."

"Who'll be the thirteen guys?"

"We wouldn't have to make it thirteen at first. We could start with the three of us. I got the whole thing figured. I'm not letting you in on it just because you're friends of mine. I think we're the three smartest guys in the class. That's the one rule we'll have for membership—a man will have to be extra smart. And we'll call ourselves the Mentocrats."

"Mentocrats?"

"Yeah. Mental aristocrats. Get it? Mentocrats. Thirteen of the smartest guys in the country working together. Pooling their brains. That's power."

"If anybody crossed us up, then what?" I asked.

"Just this." Benny drew a finger across his throat. "But they won't. There'll be a probationary period of a year for every new member, and then the Oath. Nobody will want to violate *that* Oath, not the way I got it framed. It's foolproof. I'll let you see it tonight. Can you meet me in front of the Seventy-ninth Street library at nine?"

"Nine? My mother won't let me out that late," John said.

"You know," said Benny, "I'm not sure I want you. If you had any will power you'd make it. Brains aren't all that's needed in a Mentocrat. It takes guts. No, I don't think you *would* do."

"Well, I can't get out that late. I won't tell anybody about it, though. I'll keep it a secret."

"I know you will. You know what's good for you."

Offhand, I couldn't see Benny's plan either, but I declared myself in. I spent a good part of the afternoon thinking up amendments to the Oath I hadn't seen, and at nine I met Benny in front of the library. He carried a large package.

"Let's go where we can talk," he said.

"Down the docks?"

"No good. You know Dolan's Express office next to my house?"

"Yes."

"They leave the skylight on the back room open. We could climb down and talk away all night without being interrupted. And they got a typewriter in there. I want to type out some copies of this Oath so it looks like something."

"How can we climb down a skylight?"

He tapped his package. "Rope."

We went up to Benny's roof and he showed me the open skylight. The climb looked easy enough.

"John's yellow," he said.

"No, he isn't. I know he isn't. He just can't get out after nine. Why don't we try Roger Dunn?"

"Too much of a wise guy. He'll be wanting to run everything."

"What about Martens?"

"Nothing about anybody. Let's just start in with the two of us. We got work here."

We climbed through the skylight, using our rope. Dolan's office was a small room in back of the garage. All it had was a rolltop desk and a cabinet and a couple of chairs and the typewriter. You had to hand it to Benny. He had even thought of bringing a candle. He sat in the swivel chair and put his feet on the desk and laughed. I laughed, too.

"This is the life," Benny said.

We looked in the drawers and they were full of all kinds of stuff—typing paper, pencils, envelopes.

"Let's see the Oath."

Benny tightened up. "Listen, boy," he said. "What do you say we take some of this? The typewriter, I mean, and all this paper. We'll need it to make the organization look like something."

"No."

"Yes."

"All right," I said. "Dolan's got plenty of dough."

Benny went into the garage and found a gunnysack. We slipped all the paper and envelopes and the typewriter and a box of pencils into the sack and tied up its mouth with the end of our rope. For a moment we stared at each other in excitement.

"Heave-ho," Benny said. "Yo-ho-ho and a Dough-Dough-Dolan."

Then somebody began pounding on the garage door. We looked out and a flashlight was playing all over the trucks.

"Somebody saw us," I said. "Somebody saw you when you went out for the gunnysack."

"You go first. You can climb faster."

I began shinnying up the rope. It was thin and nearly cut into my palms. The full gunnysack swung round and round under me. Nearing the roof, I gashed my hand on the aluminum frame of the skylight. I pulled my legs after me through the opening and turned back to give Benny a hand. But by then a policeman had him around the neck and Benny yelled, "Beat it, beat it, run!"

I jumped two feet across to Benny's roof and ran down the stairs and out the back yard and over the fence and through a basement to Seventy-sixth Street and up Seventy-sixth, with my hand bleeding. I looked back to find out if anyone had followed, but my eyes would not see and I just ran on, brushing past newsstands and people. Finally I stepped into a doorway and stayed there a full two hours before going home.

Benny did not come to school the next day. I expected the police to pick me up after class, but they didn't come either. In the afternoon I went past the market, and Mrs. Frankel's stand was empty. For three days she stayed away.

On the fourth day she resumed her place, but I still had no word of Benny. I stood that for several more days, and then I went to Mrs. Frankel's stand and asked for a dime's worth of oranges. Mrs. Frankel looked the same. All her sweaters were still dark-green with age and her face was red and wind-chapped and a little swollen too.

"You don't have to buy the oranges," she said. "You the other boy?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"It is all right. What's the use you should get in trouble too? Benny wouldn't say nothing about you."

"Where is he?"

"They take him to orphan home," Mrs. Frankel said. "Don't worry. Benny wouldn't say nothing about you. Even they hit him, he wouldn't say nothing. But if maybe they should hit him too much, he would tell. Anyhow, they couldn't take you away. You got a papa."

"When is he coming back?"

"I don't know. Go away now if you don't want oranges."

"Yes, I want the oranges."

She gave them to me in a bag and I paid her.

The same day I got a letter from Benny in which he also said I shouldn't worry, because he never would tell on me. He said he would write again and send me the Oath of the Mentocrats, but that was the last I heard of him.

The Eagle

November, 1941

John Russell was standing, saw in hand, on top of the bare hill behind his barn when a new Oldsmobile convertible turned off the road and stopped in front of his single gas pump. Russell glanced about for his hired hand, Matt, and saw him limping across the hollow on the ocean side of the slope. In spite of the high November sun, fog still clung to the ground there, and covered Matt's game leg as he made his way through the underbrush. Russell calculated the time it would take Matt to reach the pump, and decided to go down himself.

He was a big man, almost old, and he walked heavily, letting the saw swing and scratch against the denim of his overalls. He had wasted a full hour of his morning in trying to put an edge on the saw before he realized that no amount of filing would make its teeth bite again. Money would have to be laid out for a new saw and for creosoting the roof over his bedroom and for a new battery in the Model A and for three new inner tubes and at least one tire. Somehow and from someone he would have to raise a minimum of two hundred dollars to carry him through the winter.

Since rationing came in, his gas pump had barely earned its keep, and now that the last of the summer people had left Maine, entire days went by without a car pulling up.

A woman got out of the Oldsmobile and stood leaning against one of the front fenders. When Russell came within twenty yards of her, he saw that she was his daughter Ellen. She had not been up from New York for over a year. Her visits had become more and more infrequent and brief during the six years since her mother's death. Each year she looked younger and more and more like the tourists who used to stop and say "Fill it up" and drive away without troubling to count their change. And yet, he thought, she also looked like her mother, small and quick, as she started walking toward him. He kissed her and said, "I didn't know you were coming. I would have shaved."

"Dad, you dear," she said. "I didn't know I was coming, either. Out of a clear sky they decided to give me a whole week off. Came in wonderfully handy, because those people in Bar Harbor have been at me for months. No, that's unfair. I really want to see them. So I invested in some black market gas and here I am. I hope I won't get stuck on the way back. But let's look at you. I believe you've put on weight."

"Maybe," Russell said. He noticed that she talked quick like her mother, too, and vaguely. He didn't know who those people in Bar Harbor were. She pronounced Bar Harbor as if she'd learned to talk somewhere out of the state. "Want to come in for a bite?" he asked.

"Just had breakfast. I drove until late last night and overslept. Anyway, I want to be outdoors as much as I can. This is the most wonderful time of year. Where's what's-his-name, the sheep dog? I sort of expected him to come running up."

"Patch. He died a while back."

"What happened?"

"Nothing. Old age, I guess."

"That's too bad," Ellen said. "He was good company. A lot better than that grumpy Matt of yours. Does Matt still do your cooking?"

"Who else?"

Ellen shook her head. "There ought to be a woman on this place. Look at those chickens, all over everything. Is that where you had the vegetable garden this year?"

"Seems to be the only place where the soil ain't played out. At that, I had trouble with aphids and cutworms. Bad year most any way you look at it. I'm glad to see you doing so good. I half expected you to stop up this summer. I couldn't make out from your handwriting exactly where it was you spent your vacation."

"Nevada," she said. "Friend of mine was getting a divorce and I went along to keep her company for the first couple of weeks."

"Couldn't make it out."

"I didn't have a very enjoyable time. I wish I'd come up here. My, this is beautiful country. Let's go up the hill."

They went up the winding path, John Russell walking heavily, with the saw scratching against his overalls. He steered Ellen to the north side because he did not want her to see the disorder in the barn. She looked so neat and small, everything in the right place, like the girl in the Enna Jettick sign on the woodshed. In the old days he would not have let the man tack it up there.

On top he looked around for Matt. He wondered how, without Ellen's hearing, he could tell Matt to clean up the house some before the girl had a chance to go in. But Matt was no longer in the hollow and Russell could not see if he'd gone fishing, because fog covered the beach where the boat was moored. Across the sea it was clear enough to look out as far as the rocks. The gulls were making a racket out there.

"Yes, I'm surely glad to see you doing so good," John Russell said.

"I haven't been doing so well. This has been my best day in months." She drew a deep breath. "I'd almost forgotten how perfectly beautiful it is up here. This is the spot where I'd sit for hours, just staring. Mother'd come searching for me."

"You look like her."

"I'm glad."

"She would've been happy to see you looking like this, driving around in a big car."

"Don't bring that up," said Ellen. "I just finished paying for it."

"It's good to see, all the same. My old Model A needs a new battery and three inner tubes and at least one tire."

"Dad, look at that hawk."

"A couple of those tubes were already like crazy quilts a year ago," he said. "I got to get new ones the same time I buy the battery."

"He must be going for the gulls, they're so frantic. Look at him, Dad."

"You can't stir these days without a car."

"Daddy, look."

"That's no hawk," John Russell said. "That's an eagle."

"An eagle? Are you sure? Oh, he must be. Look at the size of him. He's an eagle, all right. Say, that's exciting."

The great bald eagle wheeled slowly, high above the cluster of rocks in the bay. Under him a dozen gulls soared and swooped, shrieking.

"Do you suppose he's after them?" she asked.

"No," her father said. "He wouldn't go after anything alive, not unless it's a half-grown chicken. He's no better than a big buzzard. Lives off dead fish mostly. When he can't find any he hangs around the gulls. Waits until they catch something, then takes it away from them."

"How can he do that?"

"Makes them drop it."

"I don't believe he'd do a thing like that. He's exciting. What dignity."

Russell looked at his daughter uncomprehendingly. "Why, surely," he said. "That's just what he does. They made a big mistake when they picked him for our national bird. He's just a scavenger; anybody could tell you. He better stick to his scavenging, too. Next time he goes after one of my chicks I'm going to rip his head off with a load of shot, fine or no fine."

"Oh, no. He's beautiful. He must have a wingspread of ten feet. Those gulls are in a panic."

The eagle dropped slowly. He landed on the highest point of the rocks and perched, facing south. Most of the gulls flew off, but two stayed behind. They swooped repeatedly down at the eagle, careening upward only a few feet from his head and keeping up an incessant wild chatter. Russell thought they must have a nest on the rock. When they swooped particularly close, the eagle would make a perfunctory threatening motion, but for the most part he was imperturbable. His head gleamed white in the sun.

"I'd heard there were only a few of them left," Ellen said. "Nobody in New York will believe I saw one. It's almost like coming across a griffin or a unicorn. In a way, I wish I hadn't seen him. It makes me all the madder for those wasted weeks in Nevada, listening for hours on end to a covey of frustrated females. Isn't it majestic the way he ignores those silly fowls? You wouldn't really shoot him, would you, Dad?"

"The devil I wouldn't. Let him go after just one more chick and his life won't be worth a tinker's damn. I know where to find him, too. He's always looking for dead fish off the rocks under the waterfall. I tell you, he's no more than a big buzzard."

"Well, I think he's majestic. I think he's worth a thousand chickens."

A thousand chickens, Russell thought. A thousand chickens would carry him through the winter. He looked out toward the ocean, away from Ellen's face. She was a good girl and all during her years of growing up she had not given him much trouble. All during those years when he sat in the wicker chair, reading to her out of the Bible, she had been a good girl, quiet and sweet, so much sweeter than any of her cousins who grew up to be fat wives or stenographers in Bangor. She had done her work quietly, without complaints, the wiping of the dishes and the polishing of silver. You could see her growing and take joy in it.

The growing away came later. It began when she stopped plying him with the hundreds of gentle, foolish questions and asked them of her mother instead. In a year or less, though he could hardly remember which of the years it was, Ellen no longer wanted to hear him read and no longer ran to see if he liked her new dress. And her mother sat up half the night, sewing those new dresses all year round, new hats and coats and everything that would make of Ellen more of a Whitelaw than a Russell. No Russell, to the best of his knowledge, had ever gone to a university. As a working proposition, the farm had never recovered from the expense of Ellen's schooling.

You couldn't say she had not made the most of it. There were girls who went off to school and came home at the end of four years not much good for anything. Ellen left for New York the week after she graduated and she had made her own way ever since. John Russell was not altogether clear about what it was she did in that big furniture establishment, but it must have paid well for her to be able to afford the Oldsmobile. Perhaps, before she left, she would offer to help him out. He remembered her other visits well enough to know that he would not be able to bring himself to ask.

"Look, Dad," said Ellen. "He's taking off."

The eagle rose and left the gulls behind. He climbed fast out to sea. When he soared high enough to reach an air current he liked, he began to float without any perceptible wing movement, still going fast as he disappeared behind the promontory.

"He *was* majestic," Ellen said. "I could stand here and watch him all day. Do you often catch sight of him?"

"Pretty often."

"Do you still have the pheasants coming around?"

"Lots of those."

"I must spend more time up here. That sight alone would have been worth the drive."

They began to walk back toward the house.

"Dad, I'm afraid you're too accustomed to all this. You've lost sight of how beautiful it is. There isn't a landscape artist in the country who could have designed this slope down from the barn."

"It's poor land. What there was of it washed off." He swung the saw awkwardly at his side. "This old saw," he said. "I got to get a new one. No amount of filing will help this old saw."

Walking slowly down the path, Ellen talked about the drive from New York, the cloudburst just beyond Portland, and the ease with which you could get black market gas in the big cities. They stopped awhile on the porch and Russell talked of the new state highway that was going to route all the traffic away from the county road. As he talked, he fumbled among the empty walnut shells on the table and tossed a few into the dead ironweed covering the front-yard lawn. Presently they went into the house.

Russell saw the quick look of shock pass over Ellen's face. To divert her attention from the disorder of the room, he began to say things as they came to his tongue, memories of her as a small girl, bits of village news, marriages and deaths. He told the story of the tramp who had stopped in that morning to ask for food. At first he had turned the man down, because once they put their scratch on your fence it stamped you as an easy mark and all the other tramps in the country would make sure to hit you up. But the fellow was decent, offered to chop wood, and it would have been a sin to deny him. Matt had not yet had a chance to clear the dishes off.

"You ought to make him do more work around the house," Ellen said.

"Matt works hard. There's a lot to do."

She opened the old organ and pulled at one of the dusty stops. The handle and part of the stick came off. "Oh, Dad," she said, "don't let things fall apart so. Let me talk to Matt. Where is he, anyway?"

"Off fishing for our dinner, I guess. That ocean front is about the only valuable part of this property left." He swung the saw nervously. "You won't be so sore at Matt after you've tasted his chowder."

"But I'm not staying for dinner today. I should be on my way to Bar Harbor now. They won't know what's become of me. Coming back, I'll have more of a chance to spend a little time. This was really just to say hello."

"I'm sorry you can't stay," he said.

"I'll plan things so I'll have a full day here next Friday, going south. We'll talk about everything then."

"Well, I'm sorry you can't stay now."

Ellen led the way out of the house. It seemed to Russell as if she wanted to get into the open where the air, at least, was clean. There was dust on the mantelpiece, and a basketful of rotten apples in the corner, and dirty linen piled high on the sofa, things he would not ordinarily have noticed. He followed her to the gas pump, where the Oldsmobile was parked. She got into the car, but they continued talking, saying nothing, for another half hour. Then, as she was about to drive off, he said, "How's your gas? Want to fill up?"

"It's pretty low. Do fill it, won't you? That's awful sweet of you, Dad."

He held the nozzle into the tank and listened to the flow. He knew that she would not offer to pay for it, and not out of avarice, because chances were she'd bring something expensive and useless from Bar Harbor. Maybe, sometime during that full day she promised, there would come a point in the conversation where he could, without feeling like the tramp, ask her for two hundred dollars. But he knew that by the end of the week the full day would turn into three or four hours and that nothing short of actual hunger could make him ask outright.

"You be here early Friday," he said, "like you promised."

"Don't worry. I will. But only if you make me a promise, too. Will you get a haircut before I come?"

He felt the back of his head. "I'll do that."

Ellen leaned out to kiss him, and drove off. She waved to him with her gloved hand.

Russell went back to the house and sat for a short time, rocking in his wicker chair. Then he picked up the saw, which he had left on the organ, and flung it violently into the fireplace. It clattered against the andirons and slid under the ashes. Everything in the room was old and dirty. On the shelf, above the basket of rotting apples, his rifle and two shotguns were gathering rust. He stood up and took the twelve-gauge and loaded it. He did not immediately know just why, but as the lock clicked he grew sure of what he hoped for. He hoped that the eagle would come flying within range. If it didn't, he knew just where to look for it. Somewhere near the waterfall, where the fish lay dead on the white rocks below.

The Bronze Thing

November, 1949

After the war, John Riordan and his father came to the United States. They moved into a room in the Chelsea section of New York. It was a large room and not too poorly furnished. It had running water, hot and cold, and it had a better rug than any that John's mother had called her own in the old cottage on the outskirts of Southampton. All the same, after renting the room John's father said, "It's just as well your mother never lived to see this day. She wouldn't have liked it here."

That was as long a speech as John's father ever made, almost. He got a job on the evening shift at an express company, and John saw very little of him except on weekends. Then they sometimes walked up to the docks to look at the Cunarders and maybe talk to one of the stewards, who had been in Southampton only a few days before. And then John's father might make another of his speeches: "I wouldn't go back home if they made me Lord Mayor of London. This is the country for me."

It was not the country for John. There were too many buildings in New York, too close together. There was no give in the concrete underfoot. The subway tunnels were too dark and the nights not dark enough. There was something wrong with just about everything. True, the docks were not too different from the docks in Southampton, and from time to time the reassuring shapes of the Cunarders appeared in the harbor. But the ships pulled out again, and the buildings remained, and the trucks roared along the wrong side of the street, and at night the fire engines were all equipped with air-raid sirens. John's mother had been killed in a night raid.

John had no trouble with his classroom work in the American high school that he entered in January. Being without friends and without anything to do but study, he got excellent grades. In class, the chaps did not dare laugh aloud at his accent, and if John fixed his eyes on a corner of the ceiling, he did not have to see their smiles. They called him Scotty, for some reason—Scotty Riordan. Perhaps they thought Southampton was in Scotland. They played baseball, a stupid game where you spent most of your time waiting around for something to happen. Basketball was not quite so foolish, though it did not seem right to use your hands on that kind of ball when you might have been kicking it, in the natural way. From the age of six to the day before he boarded the ship for America, John had played soccer, the only game in the world.

During his first summer vacation, John saw no games of any kind played. He had a job in the stockroom of a wholesale fur house, and at night and on weekends he was too tired to do anything but read. He had found a shelf of Rudyard Kipling's works in the branch library on West Twenty-third Street, and he read all of them except the travel books. Even the poetry. And he worked at plans for stowing away on the Mauretania, or on some other ship bound for Southampton.

The plans never came to anything. The gangplanks were either pulled to or surrounded by men with eyes. You could not climb up along the anchor chains. John thought of bribing a steward he knew, but, face to face with the man, he lost his nerve. He looked in the library catalogue under "Stowaway" and found only a single card, which listed a novel. The book turned out to be interesting but not at all helpful.

In the fall, John went back to high school, and something wonderful happened. A notice appeared on the bulletin board downstairs: "Tryouts for the soccer squad will be held Saturday morning at Van Cortlandt Park. Victor Monnier, Captain."

From that day on, John had nearly everything he wanted. He had a brand new uniform, complete with cleats and shin guards. He had a place to go after school. He had friends, a dozen of them, and they told him he was the best man the team had ever had, even better than Vic Monnier. The school paper printed a paragraph about Scotty Riordan. It said he was a stellar performer.

In Southampton, John had been regarded as a good, steady player, but no one had made much of a fuss over him. The school and the town had been full of good, steady players. In the American school, only those who had no chance of making the football or basketball squads came out for soccer. Vic Monnier alone played the kind of game that might have passed in England, and Vic had learned his soccer in France. The rest had only one idea, to get the ball away and up toward the other goal. They could neither head the ball nor kick it with anything but their toes. You wouldn't have known God had given them insteps to use. There was one big fullback, Janssen, who kicked up divots more often than not.

To John, it didn't make too much difference how poorly the others played. The main thing was that he had friends. Also, he could play a real game again. When you came down to it, there was nothing like the feel of dribbling a lively new ball down the field and making it behave as it should. After John kicked a goal, half the team would gather to pump his hand or to hug him around the neck. Vic Monnier consulted him about everything, and that was nice, too.

Though born in France, Vic could talk better American than John. He was older by a year or more, and he knew a lot about places to go and things to see in New York. Sometimes they walked down Riverside Drive and looked at the aircraft carriers and the yachts. John scarcely ever thought of stowing away any more. Vic was a good friend.

The team lost its first games, mostly because the other schools had more foreigners in their lineups—South Americans, Austrians, Poles, some of whom had been in D.P. camps. Many of those who came to see the games at Crotona Park or the practice sessions at Van Cortlandt were also foreigners. Most of them were grown men. By the way some of them returned the ball when it went out of bounds, John could tell they were experienced players, and they made him feel a little funny about performing with so awkward a team. They looked hungry for a kick at the ball. It was like playing tennis with the Davis Cup team in the stands.

John noticed one man who never missed a practice, a slight, blond man of about forty, with blue eyes set very deep in his head. That one always stood behind the goal lines. Unlike the others, he did not run eagerly after an out-of-bounds ball. When a ball came at him, he would throw, not kick, it back into play, but he'd throw it one-handed, for distance, like a soccer goalie, and not like an American basketball player. John saw that the man could not kick at all. His right leg was artificial, made of wood.

His name was Tony Hockett, and he, too, was English. He talked to John and Vic during one of the breaks. He had come to the United States a few years after the other war, he told them, but by the time he was a boy of eighteen he had already played a full season of soccer with Doncaster, Third Division Northern. He said he had been approached at the end of that season by Liverpool, a First Division team. In the United States, he had had no chance to play. Less than a year after coming to New York, he had lost his leg in a subway accident. He got no compensation, because in court the transit company's lawyer proved he had been careless.

Tony was a friendly man. He explained to Vic and John that now he could spend his afternoons as he wished, because he was in the newspaper game, working nights. He also said he had a few other irons in the fire.

That was the only time John ever heard Tony Hockett call anything but soccer a game. Vic said you couldn't exactly call soccer a game, not the soccer they played in high schools here, and Tony said, "That's all right. These lads will learn. It doesn't matter if they kick a few holes in the air. The game is taking hold here, that's the main thing. The game is taking hold." Soccer, and soccer alone, was the game. Tony talked John's language.

Before long, it was understood that Tony had become coach of the team. Everybody liked the way he coached. He saw to it that the ball was properly inflated, insisted on clean uniforms, and kept track of attendance. He tried to teach Janssen the uses of an instep. He drew diagrams and pointed out the advantages of low passing, British style. He gave the team what Vic Monnier called pep talks.

It was not Vic's or Tony's fault that the team kept on losing. The other teams had more foreigners was all. In the first half of the Monroe game, John's team had four goals scored against it, all by an Italian who played inside left. It was a rough game, too. At half time, John's team straggled into the locker room, and several of the boys complained about the roughness.

Tony attended to their bruises and cuts. Then he said, "Now, look you. There's only three of them play foul. You know who they are. None of them come up to Janssen's nose. Janssen, I want you to talk to those three lads. Talk to them proper. Let them smell hell. Let them know it's a game they're in, a sport, and not some cheap brawl." If Tony had been alone with Vic and John, he would have said "cheap *American* brawl." He continued, "And look you, all of you. Remember you're in a game, too. Don't foul back. If they keep it up, make a date to meet them behind the stands. And let this be the last time I hear you grousing about roughness. Get back in there and pass. Pass, pass, pass."

Janssen did as he was told, and it worked. In the second half, the roughness stopped, and John's team almost held Monroe even. John wished the team could be just half as good as its coach.

About a week after the Monroe game, one of the boys on the fencing team lost fourteen dollars shooting craps in the gym. There was an investigation, and they found that some money had been changing hands on the track team, too. The rule that came out of it was that a faculty adviser had to attend every practice of all the teams. The soccer squad drew Mr. Fundy, the Latin teacher.

Mr. Fundy was a nice man, an easy marker, and very popular. He would show up at Van Cortlandt Park, find a shady spot away from the field, and read a book. The practice over, he would say goodbye and go home. He never interfered with anything.

But Tony said, "What's *he* want to come out here for?"

"Faculty adviser," John said. "The rule."

"I don't see him do any advising. That's not what he's here for."

"It can't be much fun for him, chasing way uptown," Vic said.

"I know he doesn't snoop around for fun," said Tony. "You don't have to tell me that. The fellow has been sent up to spy on me. I don't like it. I don't get anything out of coaching this team. It's a financial sacrifice, giving up my time. Look, I'm not grousing. What I do up here, I owe it to the game. You two know what I'm up against with the material I have."

"Fundy wouldn't spy on you," Vic said. "All he wants to do is read a book."

"If they want to check up on me, let them," said Tony. "You boys know everything there is to know about me. If they ask you what kind of a coach I am, just you tell them the truth, nothing more and nothing less. If they think it's funny that a newspaperman should want to take all this trouble, well, that only goes to show how their minds work. To them, the game is just like handball or lacrosse or any other game."

Vic said, "What paper do you work for, Tony?"

"I don't work for any one paper. I work for a lot of papers."

John got the idea that Tony was employed by something like Reuters—the Associated Press, maybe. But no one on the faculty, least of all Mr. Fundy, ever asked. After a while, Mr. Fundy stopped coming altogether. The team went on practicing and losing its games. It lost to a school named Morris, 4–1.

It hurt to lose that game. John had played as hard as he could, but two men had been assigned to cover him. No sooner would he get his feet on the ball than he would find himself dumped. There would usually be a penalty, of course, but John's play was broken up almost every time, and he took a pretty bad bruising all around.

After the game, Tony treated him to a big lunch in a fine restaurant downtown. Eating all that good food, John forgot about the swollen cleat marks on his forehead.

"You're worth a hundred of these gangsters, lad," said Tony. "A few years from now, they'll be crowding each other for the chance to shake your hand. I know. You're a winner, lad."

Then Tony rumpled the hair on John's head and made him feel he was really worth a hundred of the chaps who thought his accent was funny. Listening to Tony was like being at home. It was like being with Uncle William, who had once brought John a pound box of American chocolates from Italy. Tony said he would see to it that John did not have to work in the stockroom of the wholesale fur house next summer. He said John belonged in the newspaper business, where a fellow with brains could get ahead. He said there were other lines of work, too, like television. The thing to do was to get in on the ground floor. In television, the ground floor was already jammed up, but other new industries would be coming along. Tony would keep his eyes open. The thing to do was to make your money in a few years of hard work and then go home and live like a gentleman. How would John like to drive his own Austin to see all the cup games? John said what he'd really like would be to see Portsmouth playing Arsenal.

Shortly before the game with Evander Childs, the last game on the regular schedule, Vic Monnier quit the team. He had found out that he could do the quarter mile in fifty-two seconds, and he saw a chance to pick up some medals during the indoor track season that was about to begin. He spent all his afternoons working out at the track. Without him, John's team was entirely helpless. Evander Childs was a school they might have beaten, and they lost again, by a margin of three goals.

Tony and John travelled downtown on the subway. Tony said, "If you see Mr. Victor Monnier, tell him to keep away from me."

"He'll be back next season," said John.

"Not on my team, he won't. It's him or me. All these Frenchmen are the same. It isn't in their blood to play fair and square with you."

"Vic's not a bad chap, Tony."

"Like on the Western Front, in the other war. If you wanted a French sector to hold, you always had to put in a backbone of British troops. There's no guts in a Frenchman. They'll look good when everything goes their way, but put them in a rough spot and they'll fold like an accordion. Monnier can run. He'll get his medals. All I can say is tell him to keep away from me."

John had not known that about the Western Front. He was sorry to hear about Vic's blood. Monday morning, at school, he told Vic what Tony had said about keeping away. He did not mention the part about French blood.

"O.K.," Vic said. "And you tell Tony I said for him to take a flying one at the moon." He looked at John thoughtfully. "I bet you could do fifty-six if you tried."

"Fifty-six?"

"The quarter mile in fifty-six. The Kaplan twins have both been clocked under fifty-four. We could have a relay. We could win at the Bronx-Manhattan meet. They give you these bronze things that's twice the size of the medals you get in other events. You come out to track tomorrow, and we'll put the clock on you."

"I couldn't do that. We have soccer practice tomorrow. Tony went out and got us two more games. Private schools. I couldn't not show up with him there."

"The guy's nuts," Vic said. "Now he's got *you* doing it."

Tony was right. Vic didn't seem to care whether the soccer team won or lost. He just laughed when John talked about loyalty to Tony. The way he laughed, though, you couldn't get angry at him. It made you want to laugh, too.

Sometimes John wished he could be more like Vic, take everything easy. The more he thought about that bronze thing, the more he wished he could cut soccer practice and try out for the relay. Ted Armstrong's father, in Southampton, had got a Victoria Cross, and people from miles around had come to look at it. John wondered how it would be if he won one of those bronze things and sent it home to Southampton and let the chaps there see. They could mail it back, and then he could mount it in a frame and hang it near Field Marshal Montgomery's picture, which his father had in the room. He wondered if he could really do the quarter mile in fifty-six.

Tuesday, at school, it came as a pleasant surprise to find that soccer practice had been called off. John found Vic, and they went up to the track at Macombs. There was a light rain, but not enough to bother about. John ran the quarter mile in a disappointing sixty seconds plus. At that, it was better time than anyone on the track team except Vic and the Kaplan twins could do. The three of them spent the rest of the afternoon teaching John what they could about breathing, pace, and the use of elbows around the turns. By Friday, John had shaved several seconds off his time. The team was clocked in 3:35. Vic was sure they could win. He and John went to see a movie, and afterward they had hamburgers with lots of onions.

"Now you go home and right to bed," Vic said. "Sleep as late as you can. Don't eat much for breakfast, and don't eat anything before the race. Just lay around the house and get rested. We'll meet you at the armory."

"I can't do that," John said. "I have a soccer game in the morning. We're playing Burnside. That private school. I'll get my rest in between."

"You crazy? You can't play a game of soccer in the morning and expect to run two or three heats of relays in the afternoon."

"I'll be all right."

"The hell you will. Who do you think you are, Superman? You go play Burnside and we might as well scratch out of the race."

"Tony is my friend," John said. "I wouldn't care about the others so much. Tony'll be out there expecting me."

"The guy is a phony," said Vic. "What's he want to go around making like Knute Rockne for? Him and the time he played for Doncaster. He never played for anybody, and he's not a newspaperman, either."

"Yes, he is," John said. "And as soon as I graduate, he's going to get me a job. He's going to get them to put me on as a reporter. He said they'd start me off on reporting high-school news. You got him all wrong. Tony'd be your friend, too, if you'd let him."

They argued back and forth, and in the end John promised to chuck the soccer game. There, at the hamburger joint, Vic could make John see things his way. Vic could make it sound as if John were only cutting Math or Latin. He could make it appear like Tony was some kind of a nut about soccer. But as soon as John got home, he knew the real reason why he had given Vic his promise. He wanted that bronze thing. He wanted the chaps in Southampton to see it. Before he could fall asleep that night, he had to force himself not to think about Tony. He had to count himself to sleep. He counted by ones, by threes, by fives, and still it was a long time before he could get Tony out of his mind. Then he slept so late that he could not have showed up for soccer even if he had changed his mind. Half the morning was gone.

John felt sick. He felt like those soldiers in Rudyard Kipling's story about the Drums of the Fore and Aft, the British soldiers who had broken ranks and retreated under fire. He wished Vic had never told him about that damned bronze thing. It took all the excitement in the crowded locker room at the armory to make him forget what Tony would think. The Kaplan boys and Vic kept giving him last-minute advice.

Sometimes, during Latin class, John would look out of the window and hear nothing that was going on in the room. The teacher would talk and students would recite, but the only sound in John's ears would be the noise of steam escaping from one of the radiators. And later, he would have to get his assignment from someone else. That was the kind of thing that happened in the armory. As John ran his races, the noise of the crowd was like that of steam escaping in spurts. He saw nothing except the runners in front of him. In the preliminary heat and in the semifinal, he almost held his places, and Vic came through both times on the anchor legs. In the final, John dropped the stick and lost a few yards on the exchange, but again Vic managed to squeeze in first. While the four bronze things were being awarded to the team, John heard somebody say that Vic Monnier must have broken fifty. Both Vic and John lay down on benches in the locker room. The Kaplan boys' father came in, and there was a lot of yelling and backslapping. Slowly, John began to dress. He had his shirt on when a man in street clothes made his way through the crowd. It was Tony. He stopped in front of John and Vic.

"Hello, Tony," said John. "How did the game go?"

Tony said, "So this is where you are. I didn't believe them."

"The fellows needed a fourth for the relay," John said. "It was only for this meet. I'll be back for that last game."

"They told me you'd ratted. I didn't believe them."

Tony swayed and steadied himself against a row of lockers. John and everbody else saw at once that he was drunk.

Vic put a hand on Tony's shoulder and said, "We won, Tony. Did you see us win?"

Without looking at him, Tony pushed his hand away. Tony looked only at John. He said, "So the game isn't good enough for you, lad? Our game isn't good enough for you."

One of the other teams' coaches, a big man, had been listening. He turned to John. "This drunk bothering you?"

"He isn't bothering us," John said.

"Well, he's bothering me," the big man said. "Coming in here drunk. Beat it, you!"

Tony paid no attention. The big man turned him around and began to push him toward the door. Tony swung and missed. The big man shoved him, lightly, John thought, but Tony went crashing against the lockers and slipped to the floor. He looked desperately from side to side, as if searching for a weapon. He bent down and did something to his wooden leg. John thought it had twisted out of place, and made a move to help him.

Tony said, "Keep away from me, you bastards!" The leg, with the heavy shoe on it, was in his hands then, and he hurled it wildly into the crowd. No one got hit, but the leg made a terrible clattering noise against the steel of the lockers.

Next thing John knew, Tony was being taken out, with Seymour Kaplan carrying the wooden leg after him. John followed them, but at the door he remembered about his clothes. He ran back and dressed as fast as he could, dropping things out of his pockets and stuffing them back in. Vic tried to keep him from going out. "Sight of you will only make him crazier," Vic said. "I told you this guy was crazy."

John caught up with Tony halfway down the block toward Lexington Avenue. Tony was at the curb and waving his arm for a cab. He had no hat.

"I'm sorry about this morning," John said. "I know I should have got in touch with you. I shouldn't have listened to the fellows. It was all my fault."

"It's all right, lad," said Tony. He didn't look so drunk any more. It was his regular voice. "It's all right. Why should you be any different from the rest?" He waved at every cab that passed.

"Why don't you listen to me, Tony? I wasn't thinking straight this morning. I didn't mean to run out for good. I'll be back for the game next week. You want to know what it was? I wanted this bronze thing. See? Here in the box. Wait, I'll open it. Vic was sure we could win, and we did. See this thing? I'll give it to you. Here. It's a present from me to you."

"It's all right, lad." It was Tony's regular voice, but now he looked drunk again.

"Take it, Tony. We never win anything at soccer. That's not why I didn't show up, though. Aren't you going to take it?"

Tony began to limp toward Lexington Avenue. John followed him. Tony looked straight ahead. He limped so much more heavily than usual that John thought perhaps the leg had not been fitted back right. John felt like crying. There was an empty cab at the corner, and Tony got in. John could not hear the address he gave to the driver.

Next Saturday, all through the soccer game, John kept looking across the sidelines to see if Tony had come. But Tony did not come that day, or any other day. And there was no way of getting in touch with him. John called the Associated Press once, and the girl at the switchboard said they had no one by the name of Anthony Hockett.

Then, toward the end of the semester, Vic said he had a surprise for John. They went to a movie on Forty-second Street, and after the show Vic took John down into the Times Square subway station. It was almost midnight. John didn't know what Vic was up to. Vic led him down about six flights of stairs. When they got to what must have been the lowest level, Vic pointed to one of those all-night paper stands. Behind the counter was Tony Hockett, straightening out the stacks and making change.

"There's your newspaperman," Vic said. "And that's just the way he played for Doncaster, too. You want to go over and say hello?"

John said no. He turned so that Tony could not catch sight of him, and he went up the stairs. Vic came along behind. They walked around Times Square awhile, looking at whatever there was to be seen. John tried not to think that Tony had told a lie. Tony had told the truth about working at night, and he had never exactly said what his job was around newspapers. John felt absolutely sure that Tony had played for Doncaster. He had to believe at least that.

Seventy Thousand Dollars

August, 1949

The envelope was addressed, in longhand, to Abner Heriott, care of the Wherry Foundation, and the word "Personal" had been firmly underlined. Sometimes these personal letters came from men who had gone to Cornell with Abner and were now on the staffs of hospitals or laboratories. And, indeed, there would be a personal paragraph or two at the beginning or near the end, but the body of the letter would be devoted to a research project and a plea, often brilliantly justified, for funds. Then Abner had to answer that he would do what was possible within the extremely narrow limits of his influence, but that the application would, of course, have to go through the ordinary channels.

It did not seem likely that a project would be outlined in this letter.

The scrawl covered only a single sheet. Under the embossed letterhead of the Waldorf-Astoria, Abner read:

DEAR MR. HERIOTT:

Seems funny to be addressing my son-in-law in the above manner. Am writing you at your office because I do not want to upset Ruth, and if she don't want to see me or hear from me you can tell me so and no harm done. Maybe she feels the same way about me that my son does and in that case do not hesitate to let me know. As Rex might have written you, I contacted him when I was passing through Detroit about a month ago and he refused to meet me. Maybe my daughter feels the same way, so I thought I'd write you first. As you know, I have not seen my children since Rex was seventeen and Ruth eight and I have never seen my grandchildren or you or Rex's wife. Your older boy must be almost going to school now. I have no intention of bothering you with any long-winded explanations. I am in New York on business and stopping at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Would appreciate if you phoned me there and if I'm not in leave a message if you can come by and have lunch with me one o'clock this Sat.

Very truly yours,
S. T. Munn

Abner read the letter twice. He had an impulse to call Ruth and ask her what to do, but he shared S. T. Munn's reluctance to upset her. There was no question about it; she would be upset. She and Rex had long ago decided not to have anything to do with their father; news of his presence in New York might come as a good bit of a shock. It was fortunate that the old man had had enough sense to write first.

Just how much more sense he would show, Abner had no way of knowing. In the early days of their marriage, Ruth and Abner Heriott had talked at unconscionable length about their childhoods, and now it surprised him to realize how little he remembered of what she had told him.

Munn had behaved badly—miserably, if even half of what Abner did remember was true. He had spent most of Mrs. Munn's money and left her stranded with the children in Tulsa. He had speculated in oil and in real estate, and there had been something about a bribery case that involved county officials, something that had made it advisable for him to move to Texas. From time to time he had turned up in Oklahoma again to borrow money for still another plausible scheme, and poor Mrs. Munn had not once been able to deny him. The final separation might not have taken place if the looming expense of Rex's education had not acted to restore his mother's sanity. There had been violence toward the end, if Abner's memory served him right, Munn hitting Rex or Rex hitting his father—something of the sort. Ruth had once described it, and while she was by no means fond of Rex, all her bitterness had been turned toward the old man. Ruth's mother, whom Abner had seen a great deal of, had never mentioned her husband, not even during her prolonged fatal illness. Mrs. Munn had been a gentle old woman, self-effacing, enormously helpful with the two babies. Abner had liked her a lot.

Abner decided not to tell Ruth about the letter until he had had a chance to see what Munn wanted. But at dinner, and afterward, he found her in such an efficient mood that he changed his mind. Perhaps he wanted her to urge him not to see the man at all. He had no hankering for an awkward, unpleasant lunch, the cuisine at the Waldorf notwithstanding. Yet the letter had greatly aroused his interest.

The children were asleep, and Ruth was trying to mend a run in her stocking, when Abner said, "This came to the office today. It's from your father."

"My father?" She took the letter and read it slowly, frowning. There was an extraordinary resemblance between Ruth and both the children. They all laughed and frowned alike. The frown remained on Ruth's face as she looked up. "Oh, Abner, why did he have to come?"

"On business, he says."

"He has no business here—or anywhere else. He has no decency.

He waited till Mama died, and now he's come to see if she left anything. 'Passing through Detroit.' First he goes to Rex, and now he comes to me. I do wish Mama had left a will. I could mail it to him now and really let him see. 'Dear Father, here's your third of what Mama left, your share of the dresses and old photographs. Now go home, wherever that is.' Why do you suppose he's staying at the Waldorf? Who's he trying to fool?" She had been moving the letter from one hand to the other, and now she looked at it again. "'Your older boy must be almost going to school now,'" she read. "How does he know we have children? How did he find out about Mama's death? If he's so well informed, why doesn't he know she left nothing? Where did he get your office address? He just scares me. He does."

"There's no reason why he should," said Abner. He was sorry he had showed her the letter. "What can he do? He says he doesn't want to upset you. I'll just make it clear you don't want to see him, and that'll be the end of it. There's nothing to be scared of."

"Maybe not. But he's—brutal. When he struck Rex that time, it—well, I wasn't there, but Mama used to tell me about it. Rex was almost grown, almost as big as he is now. And the blow knocked him down. Darling, I don't want you to go see that man—or even call him. Write him a note. Tell him to go away." She looked at the letter vacantly. "He must be old now," she added. "Nearly seventy."

"He can't be so violent, then."

"But he's shrewd. Incredibly shrewd. He used to juggle things around so even Mama's lawyer couldn't figure it out. Companies would collapse, people would go to jail—associates of his—but nobody could ever prove anything on him. It wasn't only Mama he used to cheat. Hardheaded business people, men who'd been in oil all their lives—he'd get thousands of dollars out of them for those last few hundred feet of drilling. Always it was just another hundred feet or so; always everybody was going to make millions."

"I know what he's after," said Abner brightly. "He wants us to go in with him on a sure thing. And that's exactly what I've been looking for all these years. How much have we got? Four hundred in the checking account, the children's bonds, and we could cash in the insurance. I could hit Dave up for another fifty and George for ten. That's the ticket."

"What?" She looked troubled, uncomprehending.

"A joke," he said.

"Well, don't. He's no joke. He's a criminal. He's kept out of jail because he's been too crooked for anyone to catch him. You know, if he'd killed a man, if he'd been in jail twenty years and come up here, I'd go see him, try to do something. You know I would. As it is, I don't want any part of him—I don't want to see him, I don't want to hear from him. That line about the grandchildren he never saw—that's good. After what he's done to all of us. I don't mean to sound so darn righteous."

"You don't sound righteous."

"I just want him to leave us alone."

Ruth's voice had dropped to so low a register that Abner thought she might begin to cry. She had cried twice over her mother's death, but both times Abner had succeeded in leading her away from the subject. Now he was startled by the depth of her feeling, taken aback after the fashion of a man who had thought he had no more important discoveries to make about his wife. Clearly, he had never come near gauging the intensity of the resentment she harbored against her father, and he was disturbed to see its vehement surge. He lapsed into banter again.

He said, "What really happened was that the old man has at last struck oil and now he wants us to help him spend the money. Wait till Rex sees my Cadillac convertible. Maroon."

Ruth did not cry. Her face grew set, and she said, "Go and see him, Abner. Tell him we don't any of us want to have anything to do with him. When I think of that man coming near the children . . . Tell him Mama left no money and we have none. Tell him whatever you think will make him go away."

One of the boys moaned lightly in the bedroom. It sounded like Jim. Ruth and Abner waited to see if there would be any more. There was not. They went on talking, trying to formulate a position for Abner to adopt at the Waldorf-Astoria on Saturday. Later, in bed, Ruth did cry a little. She begged Abner not ever to let anything happen to him. "I wouldn't know what to do without you," she said. "The children wouldn't know what to do without you."

Abner supposed that by Saturday Ruth would have relented to some degree. On the contrary, she had become, if anything, more determined. And as she dredged up further details of her parents' life together, her feeling began to seem less out of proportion. Yet in the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria Abner's predominant sensation was plain curiosity. He arrived at one o'clock and asked for Mr. Munn on a house phone.

Mr. Munn's voice was deep and resonant. "Glad you could come," it said. "Why don't we have the food sent up here? We could eat in quiet."

Abner went up to what he thought would be a room but turned out to be a suite. It occurred to him that Munn might be putting up a front as part of a campaign to get the Foundation's backing for some scheme, a simple enough matter to dispose of: "The application will, of course, have to go through the ordinary channels." The voice on the telephone belonged, he had imagined, to a bulky old man, a Texan, along the general lines of, say, John Nance Garner at the age of seventy. This prevision was in Abner's mind when Munn opened the door. The man certainly had bulk, more than enough to have knocked Rex down twenty years before. He did not resemble Garner, but he did look a good deal like Jesse Jones, and not an unsuccessful Jesse Jones, either. He was wearing a well-pressed tan gabardine suit. His manner was easy, his expression genial. The hand that shook Abner's had large, light freckles all over it.

Some time was spent in ordering a fairly elaborate lunch. It was a fairly elaborate sitting room, too, and Munn seemed at home in it. From a number of cordial observations he made about New York, Abner concluded that this was not his first visit.

"Tell Ruth I was here?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes."

"She surprised?"

"Yes."

"I bet she was. Did she take it hard about her mother's passing?"

"As a matter of fact, she did," said Abner. "They'd been very good friends. Mrs. Munn lived with us these past years. She was out in Detroit with Rex for a while, and then she came back to us."

"I know that. One way and another, I've kept pretty close track. She was with Ruth and the baby while you were overseas."

"That's right." Abner wondered what that "one way and another" had been—private detectives or what. Mrs. Munn had had no friends who could have kept her husband posted.

"She didn't get on with Rex," Munn said. He made that as a flat statement, with no special emphasis. "My guess is that Rex is not an easy fellow to get on with. What do you think?"

Abner tried to look noncommittal. Munn *had* kept pretty close track.

The old man smiled, not unpleasantly. "All I mean is, anybody who didn't get on with Mrs. Munn must be a hard man to please. That was a fast talk I had over the phone with Rex."

"Did he say he hadn't got on with Mrs. Munn?"

"No. All he said was he's not liable to get on with me. I cracked him on the jaw once. I'll guarantee you've heard about that."

"Yes, I have," said Abner.

"There was as wasted a crack on the jaw as you ever saw," Munn said, pensively. "I had no idea the boy was going to settle in Detroit, and as a lawyer at that. Suppose, now, he'd settled in Dallas, where I live. Then that crack would've been part of his education. In Dallas, it would've been a real help for him to know there's some words you don't use when you're talking to a full-grown man. Well, here's our food."

Abner did not believe there was much truth to Munn's suggestion of the difference in the chivalric codes of Dallas and Detroit; he had met his share of Texans in the Navy. Nevertheless, he found himself smiling, no doubt because he was basically well disposed toward the idea of educating Rex.

After the waiter had left, Abner looked in vain for some gaucherie, some sign of the small-time confidence man in the process of creating an impression. Munn's whole manner was of one accustomed to unexceptionable room service. He did not urge any drinks on Abner. Nor did he make any pointed display of sobriety. He had several half-filled bottles on a sideboard and from time to time poured himself a jigger of bourbon.

"That's too bad about Rex and his mother," said Munn. "Maybe he's the kind of man doesn't like to be forgiven too often. And she was the forgivingest woman ever lived, bless her heart. There's some men can't take that. This is pretty good steak."

"Mine's excellent."

"How much do you make a year at that job of yours?"

Abner was surprised enough to answer. "Sixty-five hundred."

"That your only income?"

"Yes." Abner did not know why he felt defensive about his salary, but he did. Slightly annoyed, he said, "Why do you ask?"

"Not because it's any of my business. I figured it'd be somewhere between five and eight. I like to think I can guess how much different people make. The way some fellows like to spot accents. Do you find you can get along on that?"

"Just about."

"Ruth satisfied?"

"She seems to be." Abner wondered if he ought not to ask a few questions of his own. Where, sir, have you been these past twenty years? How much have you made? Would you like to know who supported your wife after the war?

Munn spent some time apparently pondering his next question. "You don't happen to have a picture of Ruth on you?" he asked. "Or of the children?"

"Why, no, I haven't," Abner said. He thought he detected the first break in the old man's air of assurance. "Overseas, I always carried a few, but now that I go home every day . . ."

The old man waited for him to continue.

"The boys look more like their mother than me. They're all kind of pretty. The baby's fat. Jim's doing well at kindergarten."

"And Ruth don't want to see me—right?"

"Well, not now," Abner heard himself saying. "She was quite upset to hear from you after all this time. She is still a long way from getting over her mother's death. Maybe later . . ."

"And she thinks I'm exactly what Rex called me that time in Tulsa—right?"

"It's true she doesn't think of you kindly."

"No reason why she should," Munn said. "That's only natural. A girl whose marriage looks to be working out all right—you can't expect her to see where somebody else's didn't. I said I wasn't going to bother you with long-winded explanations. What I'd like to ask is if Ruth feels the same way about me Rex does."

"I don't know what Rex told you."

"To make it short, he don't want any contact with me, come hell or high water. Is Ruth like her brother?"

"Ruth is not like her brother." Looking at the man, Abner could not bring himself to say what he had come to say, irrevocably. "Not at all. But it's true she doesn't want to see you, not at the moment."

Munn nodded. He had stopped eating. Now he went to work on the last of his steak. "That's what I wanted to make sure about," he said. "You go to the theatre much?" he asked, after a pause.

"Not much."

"I've been to a show every night this week. There's one thing I wish we had more of in Dallas." Then, on finding that Abner had not seen "Mister Roberts," he gave a spirited account of the play and urged his guest to see it soon. He ate his apple pie and a hearty slice of cheese.

"I'm fixing to come up here once a year and see all the shows," he said. "That's the nice part about being retired. You don't have the feeling that if you take a few days off, the other fellow is going to get the jump on you. They can jump and find diamonds on all the real estate I ever sold and it wouldn't bother me none. It's plain S. T. Munn now—no more S. T. Munn, Incorporated. How would Ruth take it if I was to set up a trust fund for your children?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I reckon *you* know what a trust fund is?"

"I know what a trust fund is," Abner said.

"Well, then. Day after tomorrow, I'm setting up a trust fund of seventy thousand dollars for your children. It's theirs. Outright. They can begin to draw on it when they come of college age. There should be plenty of interest by then, too. No strings attached. If Ruth wants to see me about it, fine. If not—well, maybe she'll change her mind one of these days. Another thing: If she's like her mother, she'll be wanting to know where the money came from. You got a lawyer?"

"No."

"Well, your Foundation must have a few. Pick one out and send him up here. I'll tell him where he can check on me. Or you can do it yourself, if you like. Go over to the Chase National Bank and ask them if S. T. Munn, of Dallas, is good for seventy thousand. Make it a hundred and seventy—or more. And if Ruth wants to know where it came from, tell her S. T. Munn, Incorporated, had a hand in producing some natural gas. Before you leave, I'll give you a copy of a magazine that wrote it up. I can't claim all the credit, but I got some of the cash. And I can't take it with me, like the fellow says. You haven't played much poker, have you?"

"No," Abner said. "Poker?"

Munn laughed. "All I mean is you look pretty much the way you feel. You don't go to shows, you don't play poker. What *do* you do in your spare time?"

"Why, different things. I don't know. I guess I did look surprised. I am. It'd be a wonderful break for the boys. If Ruth—" Abner had been on the point of beginning to think aloud. He hoped he did not sound as confused as he was. "I guess the thing to say is thank you very much. You're right. Ruth will want to know more about it. Do you mind my asking why you're doing this?"

"Not at all. I'm sixty-eight, and I feel like setting up a trust fund. Let me say it over. There's no strings attached. I got no explanations to make about what happened between me and Mrs. Munn. We couldn't get on together, so we did the next-best thing. I'd like to make Ruth's acquaintance, and I'd like to meet my grandchildren.

Yes, sir, I would. But that's up to her. The trust fund is being set up regardless. The papers will be signed on Monday. Like you say, it's a break for the children. Why not, if they're as pretty as you claim?"

"Did I claim—" Abner began.

"Yes, sir, you did, and I believe it. Mrs. Munn used to be a fine-looking woman, and Ruth was a right pretty little girl herself. I still have a picture of her all dressed up in riding clothes. She sat that pony real good. You tell her I got a ranch there just outside Dallas, and you're all welcome any time, and for as long as you like. Give me a day's notice and we'll see what we can do about ponies for the boys."

The door opened, and a girl backed in, pulling three hatboxes after her. "Hi, Sam," she said. "These damn boxes." She saw Abner. "Oh. Company."

Both men stood up. She stacked the boxes on the floor.

"This is Miss Cassidy," said Munn. "My secretary. Miss Cassidy, Mr. Heriott."

She was a handsome girl, no older than Ruth—perhaps younger. She had evidently expected to find Munn alone. In an accent that seemed more Georgia than Texas, she said, "I'll only be a minute. I was just wondering if I could leave these boxes here. I could have had them delivered on Monday, but I don't know which hat I want to wear tonight. If I went downstairs now and had a drink all by my lonesome, maybe that'll help me decide. You're sure you haven't changed your mind about giving me the afternoon off, Mr. Munn?"

"No. You go on down, Bertha. Have your drink."

"I ought to get these boxes out of the way."

She bent to pick them up, and Abner started to help.

"They'll be all right there," said Munn.

"Goodbye now," Miss Cassidy said. "I was glad to have met you, Mr. Heriott." She left.

Thinking about Miss Cassidy later in the day, Abner remembered several things. She had come in—backed in, rather—without knocking. She had called the old man Sam and then switched to Mr. Munn. She had been very well turned out. She had just bought three hats at Bergdorf Goodman.

S. T. Munn, professedly not given to long-winded explanations, said, "Let's see, now. Let me see if I can find that magazine article. That's for Ruth if she wants to know where the money came from."

He went into the other room and came back with a magazine. "It's all in there," he said, "the whole story. If she wants to get in touch with me, I'll be up here through next Wednesday. If she doesn't—well, you and I will be seeing each other anyhow. The papers'll be ready."

"I don't know what to say, quite."

Munn laughed again. He had a sudden laugh, of considerable volume. "In cases like that," he said, "my experience has been that it's best not to say anything."

Abner was halfway home on the Madison Avenue bus before he regained enough presence of mind to read the article. It had run in a trade journal eight months before. Most of the piece consisted of technical data about the development of a new natural-gas field in Kansas, but there were some lyric passages about the vision and persistence of S. T. Munn, who had surmounted great obstacles in bringing the project to fruition. Abner finished reading in much the same giddy mood that had seized him when his convoy was surprised off New Guinea by a formation of two-engine bombers that turned out to be Australian, not Japanese.

Seventy thousand dollars, with interest, for the boys. It was more money than Abner had earned working steadily since the age of twenty-two. The whole complex of insurance premiums, college tuition, petty economies, obscure apprehensions solved by an old man he had met at lunch. Nothing must happen before Monday. Forty-eight more hours and the convoy would be safe. It was overwhelming, preposterous, unheard of. The planes were Australian.

He found Ruth alone with the baby. Jim was visiting in the apartment directly overhead. Ruth and the woman upstairs took the older children off each other's hands on alternate days. Abner could hear the feet pounding above the long hallway while Ruth read the article. He made her do that first. And she said just what he had thought she would say: "What's it mean?"

Then she listened in silence, except for an occasional question, to the full account, which Abner tried to make chronological, orderly. In the next room, the baby fell asleep in his play pen.

Passionately, with an emphasis that jolted Abner, Ruth said, "I will *not* see him. Not *ever*." Her face flushed.

"He said you didn't have to."

"Seventy thousand dollars. That's too cheap. I must say that's too cheap. Families come higher than that. You can't walk into the nearest bargain basement and pick up a family for that."

"He didn't give me the impression he was trying to buy a family. He said there were no strings attached."

"All he wanted was a glimpse of a few snapshots—is that it?"

"He just asked if I happened to have any on me."

"What for, to show them off to Miss Cassidy? To show her what splendid-looking children she'll have one of these days?"

"Miss Cassidy wasn't in the room at the time."

Ruth ran a hand through her hair. She said slowly, "Abner, I believe you liked him."

"I think maybe I did. He's rather an engaging old guy, you know."

"Six months after he married Mama," Ruth continued, in the same slow voice, "he brought another woman to the house. Mama had been out of town for just that one night. The maid told her. Now I suppose he wants to bring Miss Cassidy here for dinner. Abner, the things he did to Mama! The lies he told to get money out of her!"

"I don't know how much it was, but he seems to be returning it with interest."

"Returning it to whom? To Mama? Who's going to return the years she spent with him, the years she spent alone? No, I'll never see him. He's obscene. I'll never see him. And don't you try to talk me into it."

"I'm not trying to talk you into it," said Abner.

"I won't touch his money. He knows that if we take it, I'll be morally obliged to see him."

"No, you won't."

"No? Men like him don't just give that kind of money away. You ask Miss Cassidy. He knew she could be had for a suite at the Waldorf and three hats from Bergdorf Goodman. And he knew we'd come higher, so he offers seventy thousand, with a couple of ponies thrown in for good measure. That's how his mind works. Cash and carry. And you fell for it."

"I fell for nothing. I told you he said there were no strings attached. I wish I didn't have to keep repeating that."

"Abner, listen to me, I couldn't take his money and not see him. Can't you understand that would be every bit as cheap as the things *he* does?"

Appalled, Abner saw her face—the set of her mouth, the lines around her jaw. Ruth was, then, fully, ultimately, idiotically determined to turn the money down. She must not. The planes must remain Australian.

"Can't you?" she asked again.

Ruth may be right, he thought. Munn, no matter what he said, may in the end insist on seeing her and the boys. Well, what of it? What in the bloody hell of it? Couldn't she do that much? The chance that she might be right, added to the suggestion that he was being venal, or at any rate wanting in sensibility, galled Abner. "Damn it to hell," he said, "the man isn't offering *you* the money. He's offering it to the boys."

In eight years of marriage, neither of them, however provoked, had ever spoken in a tone so saturated with chill, open enmity. Ruth stared at him, covered her face, and began to cry. "Abner," she said before the sobs tore into her voice.

Abner stood up. He would have to stop her crying. He could not think straight while Ruth cried. She was sweet and good, and he loved her, and she must not cry. He must be able to think straight now and control her, at least through Monday. Mrs. Munn had been sweet and good, too, but he had not loved her, and she was dead, and it made no difference now what Munn had done to her. It made no difference about the old man at the Waldorf-Astoria. The only thing that mattered now was the miraculously possible sum of seventy thousand dollars. Perhaps more. Perhaps a hundred, two hundred, three hundred thousand. Abner stopped in front of Ruth's chair and took hold of her wet face. By the way she leaned against him, he knew that when Monday came, she would do as he wished. He was the stronger.

Choice of Weapons

May, 1947

At the railroad station in Buffalo, Dick spent fifteen minutes trying to reach the Ballards by phone. Time after time he got a busy signal. When at last the call went through it was Edith who answered.

"Darling," she said. "Grab the first taxi and come out. Can you stay for dinner? Please don't say you can't."

"I can do better than that," he said. "I don't have to be in New York until tomorrow evening. I'd like to spend the night, if I may."

"If you may? We'll give you the best bed in the house. Wait till Tim hears. He'll want you all to himself. Do you realize it's been almost three years? Hang up and come at once."

Dick hung up obediently, and he took the first taxi. This stopover in Buffalo had been a happy afterthought, and now he looked forward eagerly to the visit. He had always felt close to Edith. They had grown up in adjoining houses and for a strange few months, to their parents' slight concern, they had been kissing cousins on a virtually adult scale. Even years later, when she'd married Vern Ballard, Dick had been predisposed not to like the man. But the marriage had turned out well. Although Dick had never really got to know Vern, their few meetings had been uniformly agreeable. Some years ago, Vern had passed the revealing test of a six-day fishing party in a highly satisfactory manner; he had carried packs, built fires, and in general pulled more than his weight. Tim Ballard, who must now be eleven—no, twelve—was Dick's godson.

As a godfather, Dick had observed Tim's birthdays by sending the appropriate presents. He had learned only a few days ago—in a Pullman smoking room, of all places—that godfathers had been intended to serve a number of broader functions. An Army chaplain who smoked remarkably good cigars had told him that it was his responsibility to develop his godson's religious life. The chaplain had observed that the spiritual bond created by this relationship is held by Roman Catholic theologians to constitute a species of affinity, and hence an impediment of marriage.

Dick found only Edith at home. It was good to see her. She had put on a little weight, but her face didn't seem to have aged at all. She hugged Dick hard and told him he looked wonderful, too.

"Vern is at the Y with Tim," she said. "He likes to spend these Saturday afternoons with the boy. Tim has a fear of water and Vern's trying to get him over it. Vern thinks a few dives off the high board will fix him. Do you believe in the business of throwing people into the pool to sink or swim? Vern says that was the way he learned."

"I forget how I learned," Dick said.

"My mother taught you at Chautauqua."

"Did she? I guess she did."

"She taught me, too. But there was no being thrown into the water."

"Is that what Vern is trying?"

"Oh, no," said Edith. "Vern will do whatever is best for Tim. It's not always easy to decide what's best. Tim requires a lot of understanding."

"I'll be glad to see him. Why don't you all ever come to New York?"

"I plan to, but something always happens. There's school. Or Vern gets tied up at the plant. You know Vern."

"Not really," Dick said.

"Well, he's got to be in there fighting. When he came back from the service, they tried to kick him upstairs into a vice-presidency, but he wasn't having any of that. He told them he wanted his old job back, and no two ways about it. They had to give it to him, finally. Now the fellow who was sales manager in Vern's absence has reverted to assistant, and Vern has had to battle him every inch of the way. He's the kind of fellow who's capable of sabotage while Vern's back is turned, so Vern has had to be pretty much on the spot right along."

"Can't Vern get rid of him?"

"I don't think so," Edith said. "It's one of those deep intrigues, involving the whole management. I can't follow all the ramifications. Anyway, Vern has to be in there fighting. I try to give him what support I can. And he's been very good to me. After some harrowing day at the plant, trying to work with people who scheme against him, he'll whisk me off to a dance at the club and stay out till all hours."

"I assumed you must be leading an active social life. It took me a long time to phone you from the station. Kept getting a busy signal."

"Of course. I was trying to reach Vern at the Y. A little frantically, I'm afraid. We seem to be in the midst of a crisis."

"At the plant?" Dick asked.

"No. With Tim. Dick, did you lie a lot when you were a little boy?"

"All the time."

"I don't remember that."

"I must have lied well. Doesn't Tim?"

"No," Edith said. "He lies badly. And much too much. And unnecessarily. And about things that matter. We're terribly worried. I've thought of going to a psychiatrist, but Vern won't hear of it. He thinks it's something for us to work out. Mind you, these are not just fibs Tim tells. They're real lies, and worse. Last month, he signed my name to his report card from school."

"I thought he'd been getting quite good grades."

"They *were* quite good. That's what I mean by unnecessary lying and trickery."

"He'll stop," Dick said. "If not sooner, later. What's the use of being a boy if you're not going to tell whoppers? At school, they give you 'Tom Sawyer' to read and they tell you what a classic American boy he was, but when *you* tell whoppers, your parents get into a tizzy. Tim'll come out of it."

"If I could only be sure of that. In the meantime, both Vern and I are at our wits' end trying to handle the child. No matter what we try, we seem to make it worse. Five weeks ago, we did something so awful I want to beat my stupid head against the wall when I think about it. I was cleaning up the rooms and I missed my lapel watch. The maid's father had been ill and I'd let her go home, so I knew she couldn't have taken it. There was nothing to do but question Tim. Believe me, we did it in the gentlest possible way at first. We kept at him, yes, but without any abuse or threats. Then Vern thought we'd leave him alone for a full hour to think it over. We told him nothing would happen, there'd be no punishment except by his own conscience, all we wanted was the truth. Well, he still denied taking the watch. He didn't cry or protest, as he sometimes does—just sat there, repeating he hadn't taken it. Then Vern told him we'd leave the room for another hour and any time Tim wanted to come out and tell us where the watch was, the affair would be closed. Tim came out almost immediately and told us he'd not only taken the thing but lost it. Said he'd dropped it in the toilet bowl. Neither of us believed that, but I thought we'd had enough emotion for one day. If only it had *been* one day! After that, it was Tim who persisted in bringing up the subject. Time and again he swore he'd dropped the watch in the toilet bowl, demanded to know how much we'd paid for it, implored me to get him a job selling papers after school. Wanted to earn the money back."

"Was it a valuable watch?"

"Not particularly," Edith said. "This afternoon, I found it pinned to my blue spring suit. That's where it had been right along. Tim had never touched it. The lapel had got turned around, so I couldn't see the abominable thing when I looked in the closet."

"Good Lord!"

"That's what I was trying to telephone Vern about at the Y. I couldn't get him. He'll be dreadfully upset. And Tim, poor boy. How could we have been so stupid? Imagine, leaving him alone for a whole hour to struggle with himself! Heaven only knows what he thought of us. He must have sat there feeling guilty about all the meaningless little lies he's told, so guilty he confessed to this other thing simply because we'd kept at him like a couple of Torquemadas. That's what we must have seemed like—I know we did."

"Poor Tim."

"Poor Vern, too," said Edith.

"Mostly, poor Tim."

"I know. Of course. But poor Vern, too. That man has turned himself inside out trying to help Tim be more truthful. Busy as he is, he's found all kinds of time for the boy. He lets nothing interfere with these Saturday afternoons, for instance. He's taken Tim to ball games, circuses, ice shows—whatever comes to town. He's tried to treat him like a friend, you know—an equal. Vern's been wonderfully patient, by and large. And I've tried, too. Whatever possessed us to do a frightful thing like that? How can we make it good to Tim? What can we tell him?"

"I certainly picked a fine day for a visit."

"Oh, I was foolish to have burdened you with all this," Edith said. "We'll work it out somehow. I guess I spilled over. It's just that you've always shown such an interest in Tim. I've worried about your extravagant presents, though I must say Tim has gloried in them, year after year. He uses the catcher's outfit almost every day now that the baseball season has started. Has he written to thank you?"

"Yes. A very nice, long letter."

"He told me he had, but you see I'm never sure. Make me stop talking about him. Tell me about yourself."

Dick did. He talked for a good while about his wife, his work, his prospects, and then Vern and Tim came home. Vern looked older than Dick had remembered him; his voice sounded deeper, more decisive. Tim didn't seem to have grown as much as he might have, but he was a handsome boy, well made. He brought Dick a drink that Vern had mixed, and took a seat on the ottoman in front of Dick's chair.

Edith said she'd go to see about dinner, and she asked Vern to go with her—obviously to tell him about the watch. They left Tim with Dick.

"Doesn't the Navy give you discharge buttons?" Tim asked. "Where's yours?"

"I don't wear mine," Dick said. "Too much trouble transferring it from one suit to the other."

"You didn't lose it, did you?"

"I don't think so. Do you want me to send it to you?"

"Would you? Would you really?"

"You'll get it next week," Dick said.

In his excitement, Tim slipped to the floor. He got up and began to walk along the edge of the rug, balancing himself as if on a tightrope. Then he hopped on one foot to the fireplace and back again. "Your mustache isn't even on both sides," he said.

Dick smiled. "I'll have to see about that."

"You're taller than Father, aren't you?"

"Maybe an inch."

"Maybe more?" Tim asked with some animation.

"Maybe more."

"That stamp album you sent me is more than half filled. I got a set of Nyassas with giraffes on them."

"Are those rare?"

"Nobody else in school has them. If I hold on to the rail with my hands, I can do the Australian crawl with my feet. But I'm afraid to dive off the high board. I can jump feet first off the low board, though."

"Why are you afraid to dive off the high board?"

"It's too high," Tim said.

Vern came back into the room. He mixed another round of drinks. After taking a sip, he said to Tim, "Mother found her watch. Why did you say you'd taken it?" His voice had no expression that Dick could identify. There was no severity in it, or reproach or curiosity—a flat, controlled voice.

"I don't know," Tim said.

Dick stood up. "I'll go and see if Edith needs a hand in the kitchen."

"No, stay," Vern said. "Tim has no secrets from you. No reason why he should have. Is there, Tim?"

"No, sir."

"Then tell us why you said you lost that watch."

"I don't know." Tim was pale and his eyes were fixed on a point somewhere between Vern and Dick.

Vern said, "When I first asked you about that watch, you told the truth. Why didn't you stick to it?"

Tim said nothing.

"Why didn't you stick to it?"

"I don't know."

"Last week, you dived off the low board headfirst. This week your courage failed you again. Is that what happened about the watch? Did your courage fail you?"

"I guess so."

"Don't guess," Vern said. "I want you to tell me the truth. Nothing else. You're twelve years old and you know the difference between a truth and an untruth. Did you lie because you were afraid to stick to your original story?"

"I don't know."

"Twenty-two," Vern said.

Tim moistened his lips.

"Twenty-two," Vern repeated.

"What was the question again?" Tim asked. His face was distorted and his eyes grew fixed again.

"The question was, did you lie because you were afraid to stick to your story—your statement that you hadn't stolen the watch?"

"Yes, sir. That's it."

"Then, listen to what I'm going to say now, and remember it. By 'remember,' I mean 'don't forget.' Don't for a moment forget. Keep telling yourself there is nothing and nobody in this house to be afraid of. Nobody. Not Mother, not me. Is that clear?"

"Yes," Tim said.

"Now let's explain to Uncle Dick what this 'twenty-two' is all about, shall we?"

"You tell him."

"No," said Vern. "You tell him."

"I'm going to get a gun," Tim said. "When I'm thirteen, I'm going to get a twenty-two gun."

"If what?" Vern asked.

"If I behave from now on until I'm thirteen. If I don't tell lies."

"Right," Vern said. "And now the incident of the watch is closed. Entirely and completely closed. We're all sorry it happened and no one will ever bring it up again. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Yes, sir."

For the first time, Dick became conscious of Edith, standing in the doorway.

"That'll be all," said Vern. "Now let's tell Uncle Dick about the workout we had at the Y. We had a session in the pool, monkeyed with the medicine ball, and finished up with a jog around the track. There was a man with a long beard trying to do the backstroke. Funniest thing you ever saw."

Tim looked slowly around the room, much as if he were coming out of a hypnotic state. He began to walk along the edge of the rug again, balancing. That, more than any one thing Vern had said, appalled Dick; Tim was accepting the nightmare as part of a daily regimen.

Dick stood up. He walked past Edith, into the little closed porch off the foyer. She followed him.

He said, "Good Lord, I mean. What the hell kind of way was that to handle it?"

"Dick—" she said.

"All the time Vern talked, you'd have thought Tim *had* stolen the watch and robbed a bank and conspired to overthrow the government or something. It sounded like a transcript of the Moscow trials."

"He handled it badly. He *did* say he was sorry."

"He said you were all sorry, including Tim. But all the time it was Tim's fault. No wonder the kid had confessed to taking the damn watch. If I'd been Tim, I'd've confessed to high treason or witchcraft under those circumstances. Why didn't you interfere?"

"You mean tonight?"

"Yes, I mean tonight," Dick said. "Or any other night." He was blazing angry until he saw the tears in her eyes, and then he didn't know what he was.

"Dick," she said, "please listen. Vern hasn't been like this—not always. Never in the old days. He does try to understand Tim. So hard. It's dreadfully difficult. Vern comes home after work. All day, he's been surrounded by lies and schemes and dirty office politics of the lowest sort. He comes home and he wants cleanliness and decency around him, and truth. He wants Tim to be truthful and straightforward."

"This isn't the way to go about it," Dick said.

"You haven't seen the other ways he's tried. I told you, Vern has turned himself inside out trying to cope with the child. All you see is this awful crisis, and not the day-to-day struggle at his office, at home. How can I add to his burdens now. Of *course* I've interfered, criticized, tried to talk with Tim myself. Last month, when I suggested a psychiatrist, Vern took that as a personal defeat, as if I'd lost faith in him and had to run elsewhere for help. Now I'm committed to letting him work it out in his own way for a while. I know it's not a very good way. Tonight, he felt so humiliated about that miserable watch affair he made one mistake after another. Haven't you ever turned on someone you've wronged precisely because you've wronged him? That's what Vern was doing. But I couldn't have interfered—not in front of you and Tim both."

"I suppose not," Dick said. "Do something, though. Go see a psychiatrist on your own. Do something."

"I'll have to see," she said. "But tonight, if there's any talk about it, please don't say too much, will you? We have to go in now."

At the dinner table, Tim was a little subdued, but he ate everything placed before him. He even had a second helping of dessert. Back in the living room, where the adults took their coffee, he plied Dick with intelligent questions about aircraft carriers. He wanted to know how Doolittle's medium bombers could have taken off from the short flight deck of the Hornet. As Dick answered him, he put his chin against Dick's shoulder, as a little girl or a younger boy might have.

At nine o'clock, Edith said it was Tim's bedtime.

"Half an hour more?" Tim said. "Fifteen minutes?"

"Twenty-two," said Vern.

Tim went upstairs at once.

"He surely wants that gun," Edith said. "I don't know what a twenty-two is like. Won't it be dangerous for a boy of thirteen to handle?"

Dick said, "You're not intending to go through with this game for almost another year, are you?"

"Why not?" Vern asked.

"Seems to me it's too much heat to put on the boy. Too much pressure."

"You think so?" Vern asked. "Well, it seems to me this is the time for him to learn that if he wants something he'll have to work for it decently and in the open."

There, Dick thought later, was the moment when the issue should have been joined. That was when he should have said what he had to say. He wondered if he would have done so even if Edith hadn't asked him not to. It was, after all, Vern's house, and Vern's boy. You didn't just go barging into a man's life and—and what? You were not your godson's keeper. What you were was an overnight guest in Buffalo, bound by the canons of tact that apply to overnight guests of moderately sound breeding. It remained for some doughtier, less circumscribed champion to splinter a lance in young Tim's behalf. At fifteen bucks a throw, or whatever it was psychiatrists charged.

In the morning, Tim asked Dick to pitch a few balls, and Dick was glad of the chance to get out of the house. The catcher's outfit had inspired Tim to concentrate on baseball, and he could handle almost everything Dick threw his way. Dick was first to get tired. They took a short rest behind the garage.

"I play on my school team," said Tim.

"You do?"

"We're city champs."

"Fine."

"We could beat some high schools."

"You think so?" Dick said. "Those boys are pretty big."

"We could beat them if they weren't scared to play us. We beat a pick-up team that had mostly college men on it. There was a scout out there watching us."

"Boy Scout?"

"Oh, no," Tim said. "Silly. A baseball scout. From the New York Yankees. He said if I ever came to New York to look him up. He said in a year or two he'd be able to use me."

"It might take five or six."

"No, he said a year or two. He ought to know."

"Maybe we'll fix it up," Dick said. "I'd like to have you visit me."

"Soon?"

"First vacation you get."

"Let's make it a long visit," Tim said. "Maybe a year. Maybe two?"

Ever Been to Brooklyn?

May, 1940

Mr. Prescott came from none of the areas that ordinarily supply lodgers to the houses on East Eighty-first Street. When he first checked in at Mrs. Kellermann's over thirty years ago, he gave the name of some people in Arkansas to be notified in case of accident. Happily, he never did have an accident, and the word "Arkansas" passed out of Mrs. Kellermann's consciousness along with her misgivings about the man's appearance. Mr. Prescott had brought no luggage at all, and he did not look like a person who would land a job easily. Still, he not only landed one—as night watchman at the Gorham bakery—but held it through the war, through Harding, Coolidge, Hoover and well into Roosevelt. Then, in line with the model industrial policy of the Gorham people, he was retired at the age of sixty-five with an annual pension of six hundred dollars.

As a night watchman, Mr. Prescott had developed his native capacity for just sitting, and this appeared to solve what is generally the greatest single problem of any man's retirement. He continued to stay up nights and to sleep in the daytime. And all the other people who stay up nights—the garagemen, the cops, the old women who go around looking for food and things in garbage cans—grew accustomed to his face in the window on the ground floor. Lodgers, too, grew used to him, just as Mrs. Kellermann had, and the ones who got home late had learned to expect the low, scarcely distinguishable sound of the radio in his room. Mr. Prescott liked singing cowboys. No doubt, said Mrs. Kellermann, because they reminded him of wherever it was he came from.

Many of his daylight waking hours were also spent sitting, though he did manage a short after-dinner walk, besides trips to the corner Coffee Pot, where he ate. As a rule, his walks took him no farther than the Gorham bakery. This circumstance was the origin of Mrs. Kellermann's run-in with another of her lodgers, Glenn Carson. Certainly she had no complaints to make about the young man's cleanliness or general deportment. He paid his rent regularly, despite stretches of unemployment. Mrs. Kellermann made her mistake in bragging to Carson about her star lodger: how the Bulova people could have set their clocks by him, how all those years he had never had a single visitor or received any mail but his pension checks, how his walks never lasted more than three-quarters of an hour—all the many, many remarkable things about Mr. Prescott.

A few evenings later, Glenn Carson stopped on the front steps to greet Mr. Prescott and did not notice Mrs. Kellermann, who was leaning out of the other ground-floor window.

Ever Been to Brooklyn?

"I'm going to Ridgewood Grove, see the fights," Glenn Carson said. "Ever been there?"

"No," Mr. Prescott said.

"Ever been to Brooklyn at all?"

"Can't say I have. I don't get around so much."

"I know you don't. You ought to. Get stale just sitting here. There's plenty to see in this town."

"Fellow can see plenty just sitting here," Mr. Prescott said. "There's a lot goes on in this block you fellows don't get to see, maybe. Now, I never got to see the World's Fair, but I did see all the pictures of it in the magazines. This new magazine *Look* got the old *Police Gazette* beat holler."

"Seeing pictures is one thing. That don't mean you ought to miss all these big-league ball games and the Aquarium and all. I bet you haven't even gone up the top of the Empire State."

"I ain't even seen it from the street, except the upper piece that shows when you stand in front of the Museum. That surprises you, don't it?"

"It does," Glenn Carson said. "Standing on top of the Empire State is one view I wouldn't miss. See clear up the Hudson on a good day. I can't figure a man living in New York all these years and seeing as little of it as you have. Ever been to the Bronx Zoo?"

"No."

"Ever watch one of these big ocean liners come in?"

"No," Mr. Prescott said. He evidently enjoyed the conversation, and perhaps it was with the idea of prolonging it that he conceded a point. "But maybe that's one sight I'd like at that."

"I'll take you if you want to go sometime," Glenn Carson said. "We won't be able to see the *Normandie* come in because it's tied up here all the time on account of the war, but some of these other ships are pretty big, too. I'll look in the papers and tell you when they're scheduled."

"I'll be beholden to you, Mr. Carson. I ain't set against seeing something as nice as that. I ain't as set in my ways as you think. There's more ways of killing a hog without choking him to death with butter. It's just that all them years on the job got me out of the habit of going around."

At this point, Mrs. Kellermann interrupted. For some reason not entirely clear to her at the moment, she disliked the idea of Mr. Prescott's sustaining a conversation as long and potentially as intimate as that. Actually, she was frightened of what might happen if he really started going around with young Carson, seeing new sights, sections of the city where streets were cleaner and rents cheaper than in Yorkville. Remote as the possibility of losing Mr. Prescott was, she found it disturbing.

"Mr. Prescott's an old man," she said. "What he needs is rest."

"Sure," Glenn Carson said. "I'm not trying to rob him of his rest. All I said was he might want to get around some."

"Mr. Prescott can take care of himself. He don't need anybody to run his life for him."

Carson looked annoyed. "I'm not trying to run his life," he said. "All I did was offer to take him to see the ships come in. I'd expect somebody to do the same if my grandfather was sitting around lonely in a strange town."

"It appears to me the young man didn't mean no harm," Mr. Prescott said.

Opposition from that quarter caught Mrs. Kellermann wholly off balance. She said, "Mr. Prescott, I'm surprised at you allowing people to talk like you was some helpless old man. You don't need anybody's sympathy. There's plenty of folk half your age who'd be grateful to get their money regular in the mail every month. I'm surprised at you allowing people to talk like you lived in the poorhouse with nobody to look after you. I'd surely expect you to think of this as your home after all these years. Just because you mind your own business, it don't mean you can't take care of yourself. Why, you were making a living in this *strange* town before Mr. Carson was born."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Carson. "I'll be goddamned. What the hell are you getting at, anyway?"

"People who can't take care of their own language shouldn't offer to take care of other people's spare time," Mrs. Kellermann said.

Mr. Prescott did not dare look at either of them. He stared down at the window sill. Carson hesitated a moment, then pulled his hat down over his eyes, and left. Mr. Prescott was so sorry to see him go he scarcely heard the continuing drone of the landlady's voice.

The next day Carson checked out. After he left, Mrs. Kellermann had a talk with Mr. Prescott. She said that for all she knew, the fellow might have been out to borrow money, and Mr. Prescott had to allow there might have been something to that. Why else should the boy have put himself out to be so friendly in the first place? The thing Mr. Prescott did regret was that he wouldn't get to see the ships come in after all.

The Wolf

January, 1941

After dinner, Austin Reynolds sat in the living room, listening to the voices of his wife and his daughter upstairs. Leona's young voice had mounted from sullenness to fierce resentment. Then she stopped talking and there was only the distraught diminuendo of her mother's final strictures. Austin held his pipe low, waiting intently for his daughter to speak, to scream, perhaps. Instead, a door slammed and Josephine came slowly down the stairs. She entered the living room and stopped near the mantelpiece.

"She locked herself into the room," Josephine said. "I frankly don't know how to talk to her these days."

"That's true," he said. "You don't."

"Well, you don't, either."

"Probably not."

"You might at least have tried."

"I thought I had. At dinner. Don't you remember?"

"All I remember is you wondering what kind of a sailor a girl could pick up at the Whitney Museum, and being rather intrigued about it, too."

"Don't be unfair," he said. "I was being tactful, that's all. You don't talk to a girl of twenty as you would to a child who had accepted an ice-cream cone from a stranger. She feels persecuted enough as it is, for one evening. I'll try to speak with her tomorrow."

Josephine dropped into a big chair. "Please be sure to. Please. Who can tell what sort of violence a man like that is capable of when crossed? Austin, please do something."

"All I can do tonight is turn him away when he comes. I don't think we need worry about violence of any kind. On the contrary, he must be a pretty slick type to have made an impression on her in the first place. The very notion of working from the Whitney is a little too smooth for the ordinary roughneck. Where did she say they had planned to go?"

"Some movie. But what Leona says and what she does . . . I never know where she goes. Only yesterday I received a note from her Dean's office, saying she's overcut in four subjects. Good heavens, I try to do what's right, but how am I to *know?* She's just so completely out of hand. I sometimes think she should have been allowed to go to Oberlin, as she wanted to. Perhaps in a coeducational school she might have met boys of her own kind, and an awful thing like this couldn't've happened."

Austin watched her eyes wandering helplessly around the room, which was filled with her things—the spurious Copley portrait, said to be of an ancestor; the silver plate not wrought by Paul Revere. His mother's things—the framed lace, the Japanese prints—had been relegated to sideboard drawers and hallways, slowly but irrevocably, and always in his absence. Actually, these reallocations had not mattered to Austin, but their surreptitiousness had annoyed him. All that had been a very long time ago. Today, Austin simply wished he had obeyed a prescient impulse to spend the evening at his club.

The doorbell rang, hesitantly.

"Maid's out. You answer it," said Josephine.

"What do I tell him?"

"Anything. Just so he doesn't come back." She left the living room.

Austin went to the front door. Until the moment he placed his hand on the knob he did not know what he was going to say. The figure he saw through the curtain was that of a large man in sailor's uniform.

"Is this the home of Miss Leona Reynolds?" the sailor asked. He had patently not been prepared for anything so substantial as this brownstone residence. He was even larger than Austin had judged—six feet three, perhaps—and husky and blond. He was holding his white cap in one hand and a flower box in the other. "She's expecting me, I think," he added.

Austin changed his mind about the thing to say. "I'm her father. Come in."

"My name is Kevin Mulloy."

They shook hands and Austin led him into the living room. He sat on the edge of the least comfortable chair and let the flower box dangle nearly to the floor. He was not young for a sailor—twenty-seven or twenty-eight.

"Leona's ill," said Austin. "She caught a head cold and may be laid up for a few days. Too bad it broke up your evening."

"I'm sorry she's sick. Could I see her?"

"It wouldn't be a very good idea. She really needs a few days' rest. Will you be in port for a while?"

"No, sir. This is my last night of shore leave, but I guess we'll be back here again. Will you say I said for her to get better?"

"Certainly."

Kevin Mulloy sat a little further back in his chair and rested the flower box on the floor. The conversation was clearly up to Austin.

He said, "What is your assignment in the Navy, Mr. Mulloy?"

"Right now I'm a signalman, first class. Last year I was a gun pointer. I guess I've done most everything there is to do around a ship. This is my third enlistment."

"You must like it."

Mulloy looked noncommittal. "You know how it is. I mean I guess you know."

"I guess maybe I know," Austin said. "I was in the A.E.F. in '17 and '18. Infantry."

That seemed to relieve the boy a good deal. "Then I can tell you how I met Leona," he said.

"She told me."

"Did she? That's swell. I just didn't want you to think I was some kind of wolf—fresh guy. We just naturally got to talking. I couldn't figure out one of those pictures—must have clicked my tongue, and we just naturally got to laughing and talking."

"Oh, I understand. Do you often go to the Whitney?"

"The what?"

"The museum."

"I didn't know they called it the Whitney, but it was a museum, all right. No, I never been there before. I guess I wandered in off the street because it was cold and I got sick of tramping around town. I don't know where to go in New York any more. I can see all the movies I want to on board ship."

"Where are you from?" said Austin.

"That's just it. That's what gets me. I'm not from anywhere. I was born right here, down on Henry Street. Went to school here and everything. What happened was my folks died and I enlisted and never did get back until now. Honest, it's like another country. I thought I could look up some of the guys and families I used to know, but how do you find them? Even the block I lived on was torn down, the whole block of houses."

"Old-law tenements, probably."

"Right. It's like an earthquake hit the East Side. Not a house left for blocks around. Good thing for the city, I guess, but where does it leave me? Would you believe it, this is the first private home I been inside of since we hit port?"

"Strange."

"I'll say. Come to think of it, this is the first private home I been inside of for years, maybe. I thought I could go into a couple of barbershops or something down on Henry or Catharine Street and find out what happened to everybody, but the nearest old house that's standing is three blocks from where I used to live. So that leaves me on the outside looking in. When I say home now, it means a berth on the *Arkansas*. How do you like that?"

"You'll settle down sometime and have a home of your own," said Austin, wondering if that was what the boy wanted to hear.

"I hope so. Nothing like you and Mrs. Reynolds got here, I guess. Just some little place where I can throw my clothes around and not worry about inspection. You don't know what it means having run into Leona and you like this. Well, maybe you do if you were over there in '17. That couldn'ta been no picnic.

"It wasn't."

"So now I've taken up enough of your time," Kevin Mulloy said. He stood up. "Will you give these to Leona? It's some gardenias."

"She likes gardenias a lot."

"Tell her I said for you to give them to her only if she took her medicine."

"I'll do that."

"Tell her I'll send that hula skirt like I promised." He backed away toward the door and through the hall. In the vestibule they shook hands, and again Kevin Mulloy said, "Honest, it's meant a lot to me."

Austin, with the flower box in his hand, went up the stairs and knocked on Leona's door. She did not answer, but he could hear her stirring on the bed.

"Baby . . ." he said.

He knocked twice more before Leona said, "Please don't. I'd so much rather be alone now."

"I'm leaving something on the rug here."

Then he stood at the head of the stairs for a moment. From the living room, Josephine called his name. He went down and took his overcoat out of the closet.

She met him in the hall and said, "Is he gone?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"I'm going to the club," he said. "I just remembered I had a date for backgammon. Don't wait up."

He went out very quickly, before she had a chance to protest.

A Couple of Old-Timers

May, 1947

I used to think people didn't change much after they reached the age of sixty. You take my father. I've seen him nurse a grudge for thirty years or more, and I've never known him to make up with a man who'd crossed him. My father is as proud a man as I've ever run into—one of these bullnecked Hungarians. I wish you could have been there to see what happened when he came up against another man just as proud as him.

It's hard to say how my father got that way. My guess is he's always been like that. When I was a kid, he used to talk about going back to Hungary and getting even for the time he was an apprentice there with a cabinetmaker.

This man he was bound out to had him sleep on the floor, without even a pile of straw. At night, the floor used to be covered with the kind of large bugs that go after fresh glue. So one night my father tried sleeping on a workbench, and his master beat him until he lost his hearing almost entirely in the left ear. He was only twelve years old then, and those big bugs used to run all over him at night.

You'd think a boy like that would have had most of the pride beat out of him. Maybe you've never known any bullnecked Hungarians. *Nyakas paraszt* is what the other Hungarians call them—a peasant with a lot of neck.

A Couple of Old-Timers

My father had to serve his years in the Austro-Hungarian Army, along with every other able-bodied man of his time. His regiment was stationed in Bosnia when this lieutenant slapped him in the face for not having a shoelace tied. It's hard for an American to believe, but that's the way they ran that Army. Well, my father up and beat the man unconscious. After that, he had to desert. They would have hanged him if he hadn't.

He made it to Trieste in good shape, and he worked his way here to New York on a freighter. It took him years to become a citizen and to set up his own shop as a cabinetmaker. Then he sent for my mother, who'd waited for him all that time. They were supposed to have been married after he got out of the Army. I guess I ought to be grateful to that lieutenant. Without him, I'd probably have been yanked into the Hungarian Army myself and fought the Russians around Stalingrad. Not my idea of making a living. I like running my garage in Yorkville, and last time I saw my brother Steve, he said he liked being an insurance man up in Hartford, Connecticut.

Both Steve and I have done all right, and you got to remember that when you talk about my father's pride. To this day—and he's nearly seventy—my father has refused to take a dime from either of us. And he's had some bad times. Very few people can appreciate the kind of workmanship he would put into his pieces. He wouldn't let a simple bookcase go out of his shop without making it fit for a museum.

About a year ago, my father had a stroke and he lost the use of his right arm. A week or two later he got notice from the man who was renting him the shop—the building had been condemned. So he had to give up both the shop and the apartment where he'd lived alone since my mother's death. He wouldn't move in with Steve or me. He likes us and he likes our wives and he's crazy about our kids, but nothing we said could make him move in. Instead, he took a furnished room on Seventy-eighth Street and began hunting for a job. Any time there was an ad for a night watchman, he turned up first thing in the morning. He'd lost a lot of weight by then, and the bad arm hung at his side so you couldn't miss it. People would take one good look and say no. I don't think he had more than forty dollars left in the bank when this thing happened I want to tell you about.

My father's a proud man—you have to remember that. If only my poor mother had remembered, we'd all have been better off. I shouldn't be saying this, but the best time Steve and I had as boys was the years after she passed away. It wasn't that we didn't love her; we did. She worked hard and gave us everything she had. The trouble was she thought she didn't have enough, and she used to bend my father's ears about that. For one thing, she wanted him to move his shop from First Avenue over to Lexington, where he'd have a better chance to get some of the carriage trade. We couldn't plow halfway through a meal without her dragging that in one way or another.

"Andy Kincses opened a place on Lexington only three years ago," she'd say in Hungarian, "and look at him now. He's not half the cabinetmaker you are, but his girl goes to a high-class convent. Your sons go swimming in that filthy East River."

"I like where I am," my father'd say. "If the boys want to go swimming at the Y, let them ask me for money. And if people want a decent job of work, let them walk a couple of blocks."

"The people who can pay for your kind of work don't know you're alive. People like that won't step over garbage cans to walk into a shop."

"Let them go to Sloane's and pay extra," my father'd say.

Steve and I used to side with Mother. You can understand that. She wanted us to have more things, and Father was being bullnecked about it. He'd get so he wouldn't answer her, and we'd all eat our meals without talking. Not what you'd call a happy household. Steve and I would lay awake nights and try to figure out some way to make Father less crabby. After Mother passed away, we felt so funny about how mean he'd been to her we ran off from home and spent two nights sleeping in Central Park, up near the reservoir. We'd gone without food almost a whole day before we came back. Father asked where we'd been, but when we said nothing, he didn't insist on knowing. All in all, he was pretty nice about it.

He kept right on being pretty nice, and after a while we stopped being surprised. Here's the kind of thing I mean. We still had the apartment above the shop—gaslights and one of those old-fashioned coal stoves. Steve was about fourteen then and he used to do our cooking. He took a long time learning to handle the stove, though, and every so often he'd come up with an awful mess—burned meat or something. And Father'd say, "Never mind, Steve. You'll get the hang of it." Maybe he'd go down and bring us some Hungarian *kolbász* or *szalonna* later in the evening.

He could still be mean, though. If I ran my garage the way he used to run his shop, I'd be out of business in a month. People just don't take that kind of guff any more—not off me they wouldn't, no matter how crowded this town is for parking space. And they wouldn't have taken it off him if he hadn't been as good a cabinetmaker as you could find in New York. As good as you could find in the United States. Ask any one of half a dozen old-timers in the best Fifth Avenue stores. Ask them if they remember Frank Balogh on First Avenue, corner of Eighty-fourth. When the Yorkville Committee of the Democratic Party wanted to present Alfred E. Smith with a desk, they came to Frank Balogh. And Governor Smith said it was a desk more fit for a cardinal than for an old East Side boy like him.

When my father was about to get mean with one of his customers, Steve and I could see it coming from way off. This woman would stand there and look at the chair she'd ordered, and maybe she wouldn't fancy the set of the legs or the finish or something. Not what she had in mind, she'd say, polite as you like. And Steve and I would see it coming from way off. We'd make ourselves scarce in back of the shop. I can still remember the smell of fresh shavings there, and the varnish and glue. And Father'd say, "Medem"—he never got over his accent—"Medem, dis chair I vill keep." Then, no matter what she'd say, he wouldn't let her have it; he'd rather take the loss. I'd like to have a War Bond for every customer he threw out. The richer they were, the quicker he'd take offense. "Rich people got so much they don't know what more they want," he'd say in Hungarian. "I'd just as soon make a chair for somebody who'll be proud of it." He was one bullnecked Hungarian.

Part of his pride was to wash up very carefully after a day's work.

He'd hang up his big leather apron, strip buck naked, and scrub out everything but the smell of varnish. He never did get rid of that. Then after supper he'd take off for his café on Seventy-eighth Street. I say café, but those Hungarian places are more like a club. There's a whole raft of them in Yorkville. They're not anything like the German beer joints on Eighty-sixth or the Irish saloons on Third Avenue or these Bohemian restaurants in the low Seventies. They serve food and drinks all right, but mostly the customers play cards or chess into the night. My father played chess. He played with figures he'd carved himself, and he studied each move the way he'd study the grain on a piece of good walnut. I don't mean he was a master or anything, but personally I've never seen him lose.

About his pride, now. He was proud of not betting on his own game. He could have made some money that way, even with handicaps against him, but he refused to. "Chess is chess," he'd say. "I'm a cabinetmaker."

Well, there were other cabinetmakers in his crowd. When I got a little older, I used to listen to them talk. They were always running down the youngsters who had learned the trade in this country instead of having it beat into their heads. Those men were all for the apprentice system, where you worked six years for no wages. My father didn't go along with that. He said sure, there were some mighty peculiar people around who called themselves cabinetmakers. Men who in the old country wouldn't be trusted to sharpen a good chisel. There hadn't been any real cabinetmakers trained in this country for fifty years—Grand Rapids was what Americans wanted and Grand Rapids they got—but there was no earthly reason why apprentices had to be beat. Any man who beat an apprentice ought to get twenty years at hard labor.

He was as persnickety a boss as ever ran his finger along a butt joint. All the same, his helpers stuck with him until they either opened up shops of their own or eased into some high-paid work. One of them got to manage a big factory in Brooklyn. After my father's arm went bad, he looked this man up to see if he could get a job as a night watchman. But that factory already had a one-armed watchman, a vet.

I took the old man for treatment to a friend of mine, Dr. Fodor. At least, I like to think of Doc as a friend. He's a big specialist with an office on Park Avenue and a ten-room apartment upstairs, but there's nothing you could call high hat about him. I've been servicing his cars for ten years or more and I consider him a friend. We both like to talk, and he never comes to pick up his car without chewing the fat some.

Doc's a Hungarian, too—a Hungarian Jew. He got his medical degree in Budapest, but he didn't like the way things were going there and he came out here, which goes to show how smart he was even then. He's never bragged to me about his family, but they must have had a lot of connections, because his father was a colonel in the Hussars, the first Jew ever to reach that rank. The Hussars is one of those élite cavalry outfits. In my father's time, they wouldn't even take Jewish enlisted men.

About the Hussars—there's nothing you could compare them with in this country. Here the difference between the Chief Justice of the United States and the shoeshine boy around the corner is not near like the difference there between a lieutenant in the Hussars and, say, the best cabinetmaker in Hungary. It's hard to explain. And Doc's father, a Jew, was a colonel.

Doc used to tell me about him. Doc said it pretty near broke the old man's heart when, just before the war, they started cracking down on Jews and made him resign his commission. Doc said the old man had mostly forgot about being a Jew. Just refused to face facts. After forty years of service in the Hussars, he felt his country had no business letting him down like that. During the war, he could send no word of any kind to Doc, and then he turned up at a displaced persons' camp in Germany. So you have an idea what he must have been through. It was a wonder he managed to escape the gas chamber. He didn't want to go back to Hungary right off, and Doc got him over here.

The first time I saw him was one lunch hour when all the boys were out and I had to deliver the Packard myself. He was standing with Doc on the sidewalk there, and right away I knew he was Colonel Fodor. One military-looking gent. Tall and straight, with a white mustache like the old Kaiser's. Doc was trying to get him in the car, but he went upstairs.

Doc ran me back to the garage. "Your father was in to see me this morning," he said.

"Will he ever be able to use the arm?"

"No," Doc said.

"You've been charging him three dollars a visit," I said. "Your usual fee is twenty."

"That's right."

"How about letting me and Steve make up the difference?"

"You run your garage," he said. "I'll run my office. Don't forget I got half my furniture up there from your father. Cost me a lot less money than if I'd bought it in a store. So you can figure I still owe him several hundred."

"That's one way of looking at it. I'd feel better if you'd let me and Steve make up the difference."

"Not a chance."

"You pretty sure he'll never be able to use the arm?"

"Yes."

"Well, thanks for seeing him anyway. Cheers him up a little."

"It's hard on these old boys," said Doc. "At least, your father is still in there fighting. I bet he's been to every employment agency in town. Now, my father—I can't even get him to leave the house. He won't see anyone or do anything. Sometimes he comes downstairs to the office, sits in the waiting room, glances through the magazines. But he spends most of his time in the apartment, trying to solve chess problems or just looking out of the window. He broods over what's been done to him. It's unhealthy. If I could only get him out of the house with some other old-timers. Or if I had a son he could take walking in the Park."

"Plays chess, does he?"

"Very well. I've never been able to take a game from him."

"Maybe we ought to get them together," I said. "My old man's a shark."

"I'll try," Doc said.

About two weeks later, Doc came to the garage. "I want to apologize," he said. "I suppose your father has told you what happened."

"No."

"That's funny," he said. "I was sure he would."

"He hasn't been talking much lately."

"Maybe he didn't want to bother you with it. But I thought I ought to come here and apologize for my damn fool father."

When you get down to it, the fault was mine. I was the one who suggested for them to get together. I thought a few games of chess at the café would do them both good. You can't blame Doc for trying. He introduced the two men and left them alone in his waiting room for half an hour or so. He came back just in time to hear Colonel Fodor say, "Sir, I'm afraid I couldn't play chess with a deserter from the Hungarian Army."

"The damn old fool," Doc told me. "After all they'd done to him. After sixty-five years, he still won't face the fact he's a Jew. No, he's still the proud young Lieutenant Fodor of His Imperial Majesty's Hussars."

"My old man's proud, too," I said.

"I know. But that's another kind of pride. It's healthy. I've apologized to him, and now I want to apologize to you."

"You had nothing to do with it."

"I want you to know that," said Doc.

I didn't let on I was sore. I never thought I'd run into somebody too proud to play chess with my old man. But, like Doc explained, the Colonel had been through a lot. Could be he was losing his grip. Still, I was sore, and my father must have been sore, too, sore as a pup, because he never brought it up. As usual, he figured he could handle his own grudges.

Three or four days later, Doc phoned me. He said, "I've got a job for your father. I've talked to the superintendent in my building and they want to take him on as an elevator operator. It'd be wonderful for his morale."

"Could he manage it with one arm?"

"I know he could."

"No funny business, now?" I asked. "You sure they really want to take him on and pay him a salary? You sure they'd be paying all of it?"

"Don't be a Hungarian. I tell you they want him. It's the best possible treatment I could recommend."

Doc was right. The job did more for my father than if I'd made a million dollars and gave him half. He ran that elevator like he was making another desk for Governor Smith. There was none of this song and dance about watch your step please. That elevator would be lined up with the floor to the eighth of an inch. And after seven o'clock he'd take off for his café, just like he did in the old days. Sometimes I'd pick him up on my way home and he'd play with the kids before they went to bed.

Doc lived on the fourteenth floor. He used to say it was something to ride all the way up or down with those two old men together. Both of them would be stiff as a board; neither would look at the other. Doc and my father would say a few words about the weather, and Colonel Fodor would stand there grim, like he was reviewing troops again. If he thought my father would be first to make a friendly move, he had another guess coming. My father could out-proud the fanciest field marshal ever manufactured by the Hungarian or any other Army.

Night before last, I thought I'd pick up the old man and take him home for supper. I came by at a quarter of seven, but there was a new fellow on the job. I didn't want to ask him any questions and Doc's office light was still on, so I stopped in there.

"Anything wrong?" I said. "Where's my father?"

"He gets off at six now," said Doc. "They changed his hours. I imagine he's out with my father again, having dinner."

"The hell you say."

"They've been playing chess every night for a week."

"Like so much hell."

"Don't be a Hungarian," he said.

He wasn't kidding. The week before, without leading up to it or anything, and with Doc standing right there, Colonel Fodor apologized to my father. He was handsome about it, too. He said he'd had no business saying what he had, and would my father accept his apologies? My father said yes, he would. Next thing Doc knew, they were off playing chess at the café.

I still don't get it. I'll take Doc's word about his own father. Doc's story is that all Colonel Fodor said was when a gentleman is wrong, he admits it and apologizes. But I know in the old days my father would have told him what to do with those apologies. So last night when I asked my father how come, he said something that made me wonder if he hadn't changed a lot. He said, "What's the use of a couple of old-timers holding grudges? Fodor's a good man. He did his job. Not his fault if they gave him a raw deal. What's the use of a couple of old-timers holding grudges?"

Colonel Fodor isn't much of a chess player, my father said.

Pull up the Ladder, Mate

TIME OUT

WITH MEN IT'S DIFFERENT

COME AGAIN ANOTHER DAY

Time Out

October, 1945

Mercer knows, I think. Four or five times now I have caught him watching me with an unmistakably professional eye, and last week, at a well-selected moment, he said, "Why don't you take a rest, Colonel? You've been working too hard." Either he was being polite or he knows. He can't help but know. He's been doing my work and doing it well. Mercer is a very good doctor. He's not good enough to know what's wrong with me but he's certainly good enough to do most of my job better than I could have done it, even before I got like this. I don't think he'll turn in any kind of report on me. He wants desperately to be discharged as a major and he knows I'll promote him the day he finishes his time in grade. I don't think he would risk the loss of that promotion. And he is probably convinced I'll snap out of it now that the war is over. Most likely I shall.

At this point, though, I'm exhibiting an entire syndrome of operational fatigue without ever having been in combat. In two years as a flight surgeon with the Eighth, I went on a couple of routine missions over Germany but I never was shot at. All the same, for several months now, safe here in Virginia, I've been having combat dreams. I dream that my airplane is falling and I'm pinned against its roof. The escape hatch is only an inch fom my fingertips but I can't reach it. I wake up sweating, clutching the side of my bed, and I can't go to sleep again. In the morning my hands are subject to sudden tremors so bad that once I actually dropped a cup of coffee. I go to the hospital, all right, but I see as few of the patients as I can, postpone decisions, lean on Mercer. A complete syndrome of what we used to call escape behavior. In those days, a nineteen-year-old boy would come to me an hour before a mission, his shirt covered with vomit, and I would write escape behavior into his history.

Will I ever get rid of that fatuous jargon? Last night I came across a report I wrote two years ago. "The problem, then, is to weed out combat personnel incapable of maintaining an operational cadence commensurate with the functional capabilities of our assigned aircraft." Scientific, what?

"The squadron's prevailing emotional tone toward combat duties is, on the whole, satisfactory. . . . Men and officers react maturely to fatigue and battle stresses." I was quite a hand in those days at determining who was mature and who wasn't. I could tell exactly who should go on combat missions and who shouldn't.

In the neuropsychiatric ward, under Mercer's care, there is a Staff Sergeant Dennis Lanigan. I took him off flying status, in England. He'd been tail gunner in a B-17 that got shot up over France. The tail section was severed completely at twenty-one thousand feet. Lanigan fell twenty thousand before he managed to punch his way through the skin. His parachute opened in time for him to see the forward part of the airplane hit the ground and explode with the rest of the crew. The French got him back to us and he went on six more missions before he broke.

On the last of those missions we lost fifty-four airplanes. Flak never touched the one Lanigan flew in. This is what happened: over the Channel, on the way back, he went up to the navigator's compartment to get a drink. He saw some hydraulic fluid dripping down from the cockpit, mistook it for blood, decided that the pilots had been hit and that the airplane was out of control. He had to be wrestled to the floor by the other gunners and held there all the way back to the base. I took him off flying and now he's here in the hospital. I saw his mother last week and told her he would be all right in time. I don't, of course, know.

Mercer, with his gift for fresh turns of language, has told me that Lanigan worships the ground I walk on. It's true the boy responds to me more readily than to others. He keeps his eye on me all the time I'm in the ward. When he sees me put a cigarette in my mouth, he rushes clear across the room to light it. A number of times, I've been able to bring him out of sullen, speechless moods that frequently last a week or more. He is a handsome kid, with, I suppose, the most nearly perfect set of teeth in the history of the world. I should have asked his mother what she fed him.

Last week she brought an old copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* with an article in it about General Patton, an article written by a former Army officer, Vincent Sheean. She had marked a few passages. She showed me the part where Sheean tried, in effect, to extenuate the slapping of a soldier by a talented field general:

"I do not defend General Patton's rash act in that hospital," he wrote, "but it should at least be understood. It was never contended that he did any harm to the soldier patient, the 'humiliation' was the grave offense. But General Patton himself suffers a rage of humiliation whenever he sees an American soldier who does not come up to his idea of what a soldier should be. He does not believe in battle fatigue or in neurosis. This is his conviction, and no doctor will ever shake it.

"Patton thinks that courage and fear are phenomena which can be governed by training and discipline. He believes that every man in his right mind feels fear and conquers it by means of training, discipline, self-respect, and patriotism. He believes all this so strongly that he is quite incapable of understanding any other point of view. Nowadays when he goes into a hospital, he invariably says to the medical colonel in charge: 'I want to see wounded men only, real patients only. No battle fatigue and no neurosis, please.' "

Mrs. Lanigan was not interested in the rest of the article, which Sheean devoted to showing what an excellent field general Patton had been. All she wanted to know was whether her son might be exposed to some kind of humiliation. Not a chance in the world, I said.

Did I do right? Should I have gone on to say that either General Patton was crazy or I am?

Sheean implies that Patton, having been an excellent general, had saved the lives of a great many Americans and was thus entitled to differ with medical colonels on a relatively minor issue. The point is, it's not at all a minor issue. Not for me. I've got some neuropsychiatric men on my hands here, and anybody who says they're healthy is dangerous.

Maybe I'm in the wrong century. Maybe these are times when we need dangerous men. What the hell, in that case, am I doing here? Maybe I'm the one who ought to be locked up.

Did I mention any of this to Mrs. Lanigan? Certainly not. When I get out of the Army, I want it to be under my own power.

As far as I know, Lanigan is the only survivor of the air-crew members in his original squadron. He has tried several times to make me talk about the others and it's not easy to throw him off. He is stubborn and repeats his questions.

Last week I came into his ward and found him playing Chinese checkers with one of the Red Cross girls. It was a good thing for him to be doing and I had no wish to interrupt. But he saw me and insisted on my coming over to the table.

"Jean," he said, "I want you to meet my friend Colonel Gray. He knows all about me. You can check with him on everything I told you."

"How do you do," she said.

I had noticed her before, because she was by far the prettiest in a group of Red Cross casuals who reported to us on ten-day orders. I had even thought of asking her to Washington for dinner. But then I found that her group was on the point of shipping out as a replacement unit, and I'm not what might be called a fast worker. I guess I had also decided she was too young and would tell me about how uninteresting life in Terre Haute had been with all the fellows gone. She was a little beauty, though, and the sexless blue uniform did not affect her style.

Lanigan tapped her on the wrist. "You can ask him anything," he said. "He can tell you exactly how it was. Tell her about the amytal, Colonel."

"We ought to finish this game," she said. "It's your move."

"No, let him tell you about it."

There is no reasoning with Lanigan when he gets like that. He narrows his eyes and never takes them off you.

"It's a narcosis therapy," I said. "You put the patient to sleep with sodium amytal, for as long as ninety-six hours sometimes, and it helps him get over the immediate effects of a shock."

"Ninety-six hours is four days," said Lanigan. "I was asleep for four days and nights. Tell her some of the things I said."

"You didn't say anything."

"The hell I didn't. Why don't you tell her? Jean's regular. She's my friend. Why don't you two get together and be friends?"

"We'll do that," she said.

"I mean right now." He was getting much too tense and it didn't look as though it would pass off. "Why don't you two kiss and be friends?"

"Some other time," I said foolishly. "Soon."

"I mean right now. Kiss her."

She leaned over and kissed me, very nicely, on the mouth.

"Now we're all friends," she said. "Your move, Dennis."

He began to study the board and soon he made a very good move. I almost hugged her. She had handled the thing with the finish of an experienced nurse. No, she was something better than experienced, I thought. She was wholesome. Slightly too wholesome for a forty-year-old medical colonel with the jitters.

You see? I should have been thinking about Lanigan, but there I was wondering how it would be with the little girl from Terre Haute.

I went back to my office and told Mercer he was right, I needed a rest. In the afternoon, I drove off for a three-day leave in Washington.

I tried to get in at the Statler but got only as far as the assistant manager. Then I had some spareribs at Arbaugh's and phoned Don Yates. Don said he was going on a leave himself in the morning, wife and all. His children were staying with their grandmother; I could have their room for the night and the whole apartment for as long as two weeks if I wanted it. Like a good fellow, he also asked me over for the evening.

Don, as I refer to him rather more frequently than necessary, is a major general, one of the several youngest major generals in the Army. Back in England, when he was only a lieutenant colonel commanding a group, we had shared quarters. Don had been a good man to live with. He had a clear and orderly mind and he knew how to laugh. He gave way only once that I can remember. It had to do with Lanigan's last mission.

At that time, Don did not hold an active command. They were bringing him along for the postwar Air Force and, to round off his experience, they had him on a staff job in Operations. His office took a hand in planning most of the big missions, including the one that got Lanigan. I think Don assumed responsibility for a bad tactical boner. He didn't have to, but he did. In the long run this gesture rather improved his standing in the Command, but he hadn't found that out yet the day he looked me up to sound off about the way things had gone. We put in an evening of too much talk and then he suggested that we go over to town, where they had Scotch. It was fourteen miles away. When we got there, we found the pub closed. Driving home, we lost our way in the fog. As an added feature, our jeep refused to shift into top gear. Don pulled up at the side of the road and looked at me. "I need to punch something. I need a fight," he said.

"Don't look at me," I said.

"Why not? You need a fight, too. How about it? Just a short one. We won't hurt each other bad."

"No."

He talked me into it, though, and we got out and had a fight. Hurt each other, too. We fought for about ten minutes, and then he broke a metacarpal bone. He was right, we had needed a scuffle. It even helped the jeep. I had no trouble getting it into top gear.

In Washington, Don and his wife and his two little girls had a three-and-a-half-room apartment on Massachusetts Avenue. I found him wiping dishes. This was a little funny, because in France, as a major general, his headquarters had been a vast château filled with Cranachs and Mantegnas. Here on Massachusetts Avenue, his wife did the laundry in a Bendix and the the only unusual thing about their living room was a collection of a few hundred books on military subjects. Most of these had belonged to Don's father, also a major general in his time. I think we have the beginnings of a military caste here. Did you happen to see that list of generals' sons in the last graduating class at West Point?

Never mind. Don was full of chatter about the fishing he was going to do on leave, and we stayed away from large issues. I tried to see if someone who had known me for a long time would notice anything. He did not. Later in the evening he even offered to get me transferred to the Air Surgeon's office on the presumption that my talents were being wasted in a station hospital. I could see he felt pretty good about the use they were making of his own talents. He was in a position to experiment with a lot of new notions and most of them were turning out well. He told me that his office had just completed a survey on the potentialities of new weapons, domestic and foreign, in various stages of development.

"I ran across some lovely stuff about creating seismic disturbances," he said.

"Seismic disturbances like what?"

"Like earthquakes and tidal waves."

"Seriously?"

"Sure."

"No."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe, somewhat impatiently, I thought. "Do I look like Buck Rogers?"

"A little," I said, "now that you mention it."

"There's a lot of other stuff in that survey," he said, "some of it right up your alley. You'd like the section on bacteriological warfare.

All about infecting a zone and landing inoculated paratroopers in the middle of it."

"Not up my alley. You poison 'em, I cure 'em. It's all part of nature's great plan."

"I wish you'd let me get you transferred to Washington," Don said. "I can't find anyone who'll give me a good game of squash. The people I know are all either experts or beginners. I might as well not belong to the damn club."

He showed me to the girls' room and I went to bed surrounded by sets of Louisa May Alcott and the Oz books. I never had seen the girls, but in England Don had showed me pictures of them often enough.

He's a good father, I thought, and an excellent husband. A family man, as well adjusted as anyone I know. In the afternoon he makes sensible recommendations based on a survey of new weapons, and in the evening he comes home and eats a steak his wife bought at the Fort Myer commissary. After dinner, with his two little girls on the sofa beside him, he reads a chapter or two out of "Jo's Boys." He has the proper frame of reference; in England, and Spain, and Russia, there are other major generals eating steaks and poring over surveys of new weapons. It is a fine thing for our country to have a few intelligent people poring over surveys, too. And absorbed as he is in his work, Don must have, consciously or not, a sense of continuity. His father had commanded one of the good infantry divisions in the other war, and Don grew up at a long series of Army posts in Hawaii and the Philippines. Guns were made to be used. It is certain that Don has had few, if any, more moments of doubt or desperation after that night we milled around in the fog. He is successful and happy in his chosen profession.

Is he insane? I think so. Where I come from, anyone who seriously entertains the notion of causing seismic disturbances is crazy. Don't sit there and tell me that the difference between an atomic bomb and an earthquake is purely quantitative. It's all crazy. And anybody who thinks I'm going to tinker with the shattered minds of a few kids and get them into the proper mood for still another war is crazy, too.

Time Out

I had a decent night's sleep at Don's apartment, my first in weeks. By the time I got up in the morning, both he and his wife were gone. I went out and ate a big breakfast about eleven o'clock and spent an hour or two watching a hive of working bees at the Smithsonian Institution. Then I saw a good movie. I had dinner at Cannon's, came back and read a book about Frederick the Great, and slept well again through the night.

Next day, late in the afternoon, Don's phone rang. I didn't know whether to answer it or not. A couple of days before, I had called Mercer to tell him where I was but I had also told him not to get in touch with me unless he had to. I lifted the receiver and sure enough Mercer had given the phone number to Jean Weiland, my wholesome girl.

"I'm in Washington," she said. "I hope I'm not troubling you. They sent me to buy some things for a party we're having in the N.P. ward and the Captain said you'd be driving back tomorrow. Could you give me a lift, I wonder? There's quite a lot of stuff to carry. I have to buy ten pounds of popcorn and some cans of tobacco and two goldfish in a bowl."

"Goldfish?"

"For prizes."

'Well, let's pick them up in the morning," I said. By then, I'd been alone long enough and was ready to hear about life in Terre Haute. "What about dinner with me tonight?"

"Oh, marvelous," she said.

We went to the Shoreham. She looked crisp and pretty, and I noted again that even with a Red Cross uniform she could produce most of the widely known effects of a well-cut, well-filled bathing suit. The first thing she did was order an Old-Fashioned.

"Put a lot of whiskey in it," she told the waiter. She leaned back comfortably and smiled. "This is what I want," she said. "Do you mind if I take some time out from being mother's little helper?"

"I've just been taking some time out myself."

She drank five Old-Fashioneds in rapid succession. She had not, oddly, ever lived in Terre Haute, but she had been to various other places, particularly during the year she spent as a nightclub magician's stooge.

"Do you ever have bad dreams?" she asked. "Mine have to do with being sawed in half. Most of the clubs were too small for us to pull that in, but it was one of his best. He practiced all day and worked half the night. Navy got him, finally."

"No, I never have bad dreams," I said. "Not since I was a small boy."

She talked. Her father and mother had been married three times—no, not to each other, different people. She had been to anyway a dozen boarding schools and convents, expelled from half of them. How come? Oh, one thing and another. She was twenty-six, but a lot of people took her for nineteen. Her hair was naturally wavy and the Red Cross wanted her to cut it shorter but she'd be damned if she would. A bunch of old maids for the most part, male and female, and all they could do was repeat, "You mustn't be conspicuous, my dear. Don't ever be conspicuous." Conspicuous, conspicuous—you'd think it was the only word in the language.

Married? Yes, once, but Mother had had it annulled because everyone, including the justice of the peace, had been drunk. It was what you'd call a kissless marriage, consummated only when she ran into her ex-husband a couple of years later in San Diego. Engaged? Well, yes, kind of, to a red-headed boy in the Marines. She hoped to see him in the Pacific if they shipped her out that way. If they'd only stop that everlasting gab about being conspicuous. Her group leader said the outfit was up for clearance Monday and that always meant you shipped immediately.

After dinner, she poured a double brandy into her coffee. It was not until then, while watching her hands and face, that Colonel Gray, the celebrated diagnostician, grasped the fact that she was an alcoholic.

We went driving in Rock Creek Park and had ourselves quite a lyrical interlude. She said it was wonderful to be driving in the woods again and not have to worry about gas coupons. We kissed, more and more fervently, and she recited, in her pretty way, some lines of poetry. She never traveled, she said, without a volume of Rupert

Brooke. She had a welt on her wrist from the time she had tried to kill herself in Dallas, using the razor of her mother's third husband, an oil man.

"Let's go buy ourselves a bottle of something," she said.

We tried, but the liquor stores in Washington close at ten. Where should we land but in General Yates' apartment, drinking his bourbon, that's where. I had three or four jiggers while she put away slightly more than a pint. At that, it was she who had the foresight to remove the bedspread before we turned in.

She was first to fall asleep. Alcohol in small quantities keeps me awake, but after a while I fell asleep, too.

Shortly before dawn, I had my dream. The airplane was falling again and, as always, I was pinned to the roof. This time I succeeded in reaching the escape hatch but I didn't have the strength to pull myself through. There was another unusual detail. I kept blaming Don for having broken one of *my* metacarpal bones. When I opened my eyes, I was sitting up.

Jean was not in the bed. I put the light on and called for her. She came in from the living room, carrying a glass.

"It's the last of the bourbon," she said. "I thought you were sleeping. Thought I heard you groan. You all right?"

"I'm fine. You seem to be doing all right yourself."

"It's the end of the bottle, though. I'm sorry. I guess I should have left some for you. But you don't use it much, do you?"

"Not much. Won't you need more sleep?"

"No," she said. She sat down on the edge of the bed. "What I need is fifty dollars."

"What for?"

"I owe it to the Red Cross and I can't clear the country until I pay it back."

"How much do you have?"

"Dollar-fifty."

"And you'd like me to give you the rest. Is that it?"

"Yes," she said. "I got to get overseas. I don't care if the war's over.

I got to make good at this. They won't let me clear without that money."

"Won't your mother give it to you?"

"No, damn her. Nobody'll give it to me, and I got to have it. I got to get out of this country or go nuts. Can't you see that? I can't afford to get fired from another job. They got to keep on thinking I'm mother's little helper and Florence Nightingale and all that. And I can't clear without returning that fifty. Nobody'll give it to me because nobody believes me. They think I'd just go out and blow it on liquor. Isn't that what you think?"

"Yes," I said. You could see she was a girl who had been refused many times in her life. She had been refused by her mother and probably her father and by bartenders in Dallas and San Diego and every other place.

"My God," she said. "Please believe me. I'd pay you back out of the very first check I drew overseas."

"I don't think you would."

"Then you won't give it to me?"

"I might." I am, as you will presently grant, the soul of generosity.

"Oh, wonderful," Jean said. She went out and brushed her teeth and came back and got into bed again.

I let her sleep until fairly late. She was one of the girls who look even more beautiful while sleeping. The Red Cross was silly, trying to make her cut that hair. As a matter of fact, I called them up in the morning. I said nothing about the hair but after being switched around to half a dozen people I managed to have Jean's indebtedness confirmed.

We had breakfast at the Mayflower, where I knew I could get a check cashed. I gave Jean the money at what I judged to be an appropriately casual moment. Besides being generous, I am a man of well-nigh inordinate delicacy. She folded the bills and slipped them briskly into her musette bag.

We drove around and picked up the popcorn, the tobacco, and two goldfish in a bowl. You'd be surprised what an immense sack it takes to hold ten pounds of popcorn. We also bought a fifth of bourbon to replace Don's, and by then it was time to go back to the post.

We had a thoughtful and pleasant drive back. Jean was fascinated by the goldfish.

"They gasp like they had the d.t.s," she said. "I had the d.t.s once in San Antonio. I promised to help a guy take an inventory of his bar there if he'd let me finish all the bottles that had less than two fingers of liquor in them. Next thing I knew, I had the d.t.s in a hotel room and everybody was asking me where I lived."

I'm sure the Red Cross people don't know what they have in Jean. She's crazy as a loon and, for overseas service, exactly what the doctor ordered. One doctor, anyway. She'll drive all the other Red Cross girls frantic but she'll make a large number of men and officers happy indeed. Especially officers. They're the ones with access to liquor, the ones with friends in the Air Transport Command. Always there will be an officer with a fifth of bourbon or Scotch and he'll go crazy over Jean, who is crazy as a loon.

I didn't go to the party in the neuropsychiatric ward, but I understand it was a pronounced success. The tobacco was handed out and the popcorn eaten. The only awkward occurrence was Sergeant Lanigan's deliberate smashing of the goldfish bowl. I'm afraid he'll tell his mother all about it and I'll have to explain to her. I will have to explain that her boy still has bad moments but that he'll be perfectly all right in time. In six months or a year I may even have him ready for another war. All he needs is a breather. I have a few bad moments myself, and there are times when I need a breather, too. Then I take a few days off and, before you can say Jack Robinson, I'm back at the job, good as new.

With Men It's Different

October, 1941

At the age of thirty, Max returned from one of his business trips with a wife, a Missouri girl. He was doing well for himself as member of an airconditioning firm and they took a rather showy apartment on Murray Hill. Nellie Jean was just nineteen the year they set up housekeeping, but she turned out fine. She learned how to apply makeup and mix drinks, and she already knew how to cook. She gave Max's old housekeeper a number of splendid Southern recipes for preparing game. On the housekeeper's day off, Nellie Jean would sometimes roast a large goose and feed as many as ten of us. I've never known a girl who looked so much like a drum majorette and wasn't.

Max spent most of his evenings reading. I'd stop by and find him sunk in an armchair with the *Survey Graphic, Fortune,* or *Foreign Affairs Quarterly*. Nellie Jean would be on the chaise longue doing her nails or knitting. There'd be dance music on the radio, and she would divide her attention judiciously between the tunes and our desultory talk. At eleven, Max would turn on the news summary and Nellie Jean would make us a highball or some mulled wine and cinnamon toast. This was in the first few years of their marriage, before the advent of the convenient young men.

How she managed them was a subject of some interest to Max's older, non-dancing friends. Time and again, in the early evening, one of the numerous youths would put in a well-groomed, respectful appearance. Likely as not, he'd be a second-year law student from Fordham, and after a few minutes he'd whisk Nellie Jean off to some night club or other. "Nice boy," said Max, invariably.

The one time I replied "Is he?" Max must have thought he detected a shade of reasonable doubt in my tone.

"You probably wonder why all this gadding about doesn't worry me in the least," he said. "You do, don't you?"

"Not at all."

"Sure you do. I would, if I didn't know her so well. Nellie Jean likes to dance. I don't, and that's all there is to it. She always gets in by one or at the latest two o'clock, and usually I don't even wait up for her. As for the boys, the way she keeps them in line is something to see. She meets them through each other, and at first I'm sure they all think they're going places. Then, if they get obstreperous, she hands them this utterly disarming line about our happy little home nestling on Murray Hill, and if that doesn't work, she brings them up here for a demonstration. That hasn't failed yet. Nice boys. I'd never have an evening to myself without them. Did you ever meet the one from Cornell?"

"No."

"Used to take her to Café Society all the time. Last month he broke down and told Nell I'd been neglecting her shamefully and if she'd wait until his grandmother died, he'd marry her and buy some property along Waikiki Beach."

"Was he the blond boy who scowled at me two weeks ago?"

"He's blond all right. Maybe he took you for a rival. If he gets to be too much of a pest, she'll probably plead pregnancy and say dancing is against doctor's orders."

"Well," I said, "I don't know how it is up at Cornell, but down here they're pretty advanced at that age."

Shortly after that visit, Nellie Jean telephoned me at my home just as I was finishing dinner.

"Darling," she said, "can you take me dancing tonight? Max has to go out with some people all evening and I don't want to stay here alone."

"You must have the wrong number," I said.

"Oh, please."

"Hell, no."

She turned away from the phone and I heard her say, "Max, make him."

Max got on the wire and talked to me at some length about a government contract he was interested in. He also said, "Take her dancing, will you? Our cook is down with the flu and the kid's been slaving over a hot stove all week. She's really got it coming."

I waited for her in the lobby of their apartment house, and when she came down we went to a place off Lenox Avenue where the waiter knew her. She entertained me with bits of swing esoterica and did not make me dance until we had each finished a couple of drinks.

Halfway through the second round I said, "Whatever became of the nice blond boy?"

"Oh, he got too serious. I don't see why people get like that up here. Back in Missouri you could dance most of the night with a boy and it didn't necessarily mean him proposing right away or trying to run off with you."

"You were just nineteen in Missouri."

"All the more reason why I shouldn't have to put up with it now. I try right along to make it clear I'm happily married. I always take them up to meet Max."

"Yes, he told me."

"After that, it's their own lookout. All I want is a little fun, and if they won't understand that, they can go out with somebody else. Why should I take the chance on busting up what Max and I have? We're happy. Do you know what he said the other day about why he's happy with me? He said he loved me because I was the least annoying woman he'd ever known. Some girls wouldn't like that but I don't mind. Should I?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, let's dance. You'll like this number. It's slow and sneaky like."

If there had been a bouncer in the place, I'm sure we could not have got away with it. Nellie Jean danced the way I had once seen some girls dance in a sailors' café on the Embarcadero, only they weren't dancing.

Back at the table I said, "Take it easy, Nell."

She looked more like a drum majorette than ever, and I was beginning to feel more and more as I had once felt about drum majorettes.

"I wish I could be with some girl like you and Max are with each other," she said. "Taking things for granted so frank and open like. Interests in common. But you can't do that with girls. They're so crooked and catty. I get on so much better with men. With girls you never know where you stand. I mean you always know—they're all out for what they can get and if they don't get it, they'll stick around and be sly and nasty. With men it's different. It's either or. You know where you stand."

"Yep, that's how it is," I said.

She looked at me suspiciously. "What are you trying to do—humor me?"

"I'm just trying to agree with you, Nellie Jean. It's easy."

"You think I'm not smart enough for Max, don't you?"

"I think you're the smartest girl in New York."

"Go on," she said. "There must be half a dozen smarter girls than me right in your office. But I think I'm quite smart enough for Max or any other man. There's more than one kind of brains."

We got up for a rumba, and as soon as it was under way Nellie Jean stopped dancing. "These guys can't play a rumba," she said. "Let's go to a Spanish place I know. That one'll be on me."

"I pretty much like it here."

"Come on. Those spicks got these guys beat a mile." She reached up and kissed my ear.

"Fine," I said. "Let's go to a Spanish place."

We paid up. I didn't realize how stuffy the air had been until we came out into the open. She gave an address to the cabdriver.

This I can say without wondering whether or not it's true: I was not going to kiss her in that taxi or any other taxi. What happened was that Nellie Jean threw her arms around me and we kissed from 122nd Street to Columbus Circle. When it was over, I told the hackie to drive to my place instead.

"Oh, you mustn't," she said.

"The hell I mustn't."

She leaned forward and gave him the night-club address again. We were waiting for a light to change when I said I would not go with her anywhere but my place or hers.

"Very well," she said. "Then you must take me home."

She was calm, even solicitous. In front of her house she simply took over.

"Max would be furious if I didn't bring you up. You nut, do you want him to get silly ideas?"

I went in. Max had not come home yet and Nellie Jean spent most of the interval between our arrival and his in straightening her face and hair. When he did come she left the room to make us a highball. Then she returned and sat in Max's lap.

"Have you heard the latest about our friend from Cornell?" he asked me. "It seems his grandmother has passed away at last and he's all ready to set up little Nell in Hawaii."

"Waikiki," she said.

"You know," Max said, "I think it's sordid the way you lead those boys on. What do you do anyway—neck with them? Don't tell me I'll have to take dancing lessons at my time of life just to meet the competition."

She got off Max's lap and assumed her familiar posture on the chaise longue. Pouting a little, she nestled sensuously among the silk cushions and sipped her drink. She was neither angry nor upset at what had happened in the taxi. That annoyed me as much as anything else. I think Nellie Jean expected all grown men to make passes at her as a matter of course. Secure in the knowledge that always there would be some male ministering to her special wants, the only kind of wants it was politic and natural for a nice girl from Missouri to have, she nursed her highball. The pouting gave way slowly to a smile. I got through my drink and left.

The following week Max phoned me and asked if I could recommend a good doctor. He was quite put out because Nellie Jean had gone dancing with one of the Fordham boys and got so tight it was four in the morning before she came home, and then she had a butterfly tattooed on her left leg just above the knee. Max thought he had a vague recollection of having read about some process which obliterated tattoo marks without leaving a scar, but naturally he wanted the advice of a reliable physician.

Come Again Another Day

April, 1950

All told, the psychiatrist at the hospital gave us about half an hour—a pretty long time, considering it was Sunday and he had a string of other visitors to see. He was one of those resident doctors. I guess he knew his job, but I wished he didn't have to look at Burt's record as often as he did. He kept turning the pages and talking, mostly to Betty. He must have figured that because she was Burt's sister, the decision would be made by her, and I was just the husband who had come along. Then he must have noticed in the record that I'd spent a couple of years in the same platoon with Burt, so he asked me a few questions and started talking to the both of us. I thought he was trying too hard to put things into simple language, to make sure we'd understand. If he had read everything that Burt's other doctors had put into the record, he could have seen that Betty was a college graduate and that I didn't have to sign my name with a cross, either. But I guess he knew his job, and he seemed to have Burt's interests at heart.

"Burt is one of fifty-two thousand mental patients in hospitals run by the Veterans Administration," he said. "One-third of those fifty-two thousand have not been visited by friends or relatives in a year or more."

I didn't know what he was getting at. Betty and I take turns visiting Burt, and we haven't missed more than a couple of Sunday afternoons since the end of the war. The times Betty was in hospitals herself, having our babies, she made me go to see Burt even when it meant we couldn't see each other. I was about to say so, but the doctor raised his hand.

"I know," he said. "The point I want to stress is that many of these neglected patients are now capable of returning to normal life. They can't, because nobody wants them. Nobody wants them, and they feel it. So they begin to deteriorate, and pretty soon we couldn't let them go even if somebody did suddenly decide to want them. Now, I'm not prepared to say that Burt is ready to leave here. It depends partly on him and partly on you. How old did you say your children were?"

"Four, three, and one," Betty said.

He looked at me. "Your wife and I have been over this ground once before. She's afraid of the effect that one of Burt's attacks might have on the children, and she has good reason to be. An adult in the family is a kind of god to a small child. To see your god in a state of helplessness or worse—well, it could be harmful. It's something for all of us to think about."

"We *have* been thinking about it," said Betty. "We wanted to know what you thought."

"My mind is open," the doctor said. "I want to make sure just how badly he wants to leave here, and just how ready you are to take the chance. You're the only people he has in the world. If he's ever going back to a normal life, it'll have to be through you. Of course, one thing we should avoid is to let him try before he's ready. If he had to be hospitalized again, it might prove to be a critical setback. And you have the children to consider. You're the only people *they* have, too. As I say, it's something for all of us to think about. At this point, our main job is to make him feel wanted."

"We've tried to do that," Betty said.

"I know you have. In general, your visits tend to have a good effect, though at times I've wondered." He turned to me. "You say he insists on talking to you about those places—Cape Gloucester and the other place?"

"Pavuvu. Yes, he does insist."

"Let him talk, then. Don't encourage him to, but let him. You're the one who shared the experiences with him, and perhaps it's with you he can talk them out of his system. I think it may be significant that he's never had an attack during one of your visits." He looked at Betty. "You've witnessed two, was it?"

"Three."

"We've observed them," the doctor said. "The pattern remains the same. A few successive days of rain will do it. Not always. But he's yet to have an attack on a clear day. And as far as we've been able to tell, there's no connection between thunder and these periods of panic. He's not frightened by sounds, but rain will usually produce one degree or another of depression. If the depression is profound but still short of panic, he'll go off by himself and brood. If it's comparatively slight, you can get him to talk about Cape Gloucester or the other place—"

"Pavuvu," I said.

"Yes. I know it rained a great deal at those places, and that's revealing. Revealing but not conclusive. After all, you got just as soaked, and you're all right." He grinned at Betty. "Or is he?"

"He's all right," said Betty. She hasn't been through the hands of as many doctors as I have, and she doesn't like them to make jokes.

He caught her tone of voice and the look on her face. He said, "When Burt does talk, he shows good insight. Better than good, I'd say, excellent. That's the most encouraging feature. He knows what happened to him, when, where, and to some extent even why. He remembers what he does during the worst of his attacks. And he's still trying very hard to fight them off. 'Still' is the important word there. We must keep alive his desire to get better. That's our main job, yours and ours here."

He closed Burt's folder. He didn't have to stand up or look at his watch for Betty and me to know what he meant. We stood up and thanked him, though neither of us felt much the wiser. About the only new thing I had learned was that over seventeen thousand mental patients, veterans, had not been visited for more than a year, and I couldn't see what that had to do with Burt. The doctor told us to stop by again for another talk, and we went out through the crowded waiting room.

Practically everybody in that room was old. Mostly it's the old folks that come. They bring home-cooked food and try to get the patients to eat. They sit quietly on the wooden benches, and sometimes you can't make out who's the patient and who isn't. A few patients, like Burt, are allowed to come and go pretty much as they please, just so they don't wander off the grounds.

I never did like that walk from Burt's building to the parking lot. You have to pass some of the bad wards, and you get a lot of screaming and yelling. I don't seem to mind the men as much as the women. Maybe it's because the men's hair can't ever get into so many kinds of a mess, or because women do the worst of the screaming. Anyway, it sounds worse to me. There were days I spent in the Marine Corps when it must have looked like the English language was made up of two short words, but I never knew what those words could mean until I had them screamed at me by women from barred windows. Having Betty at my side made me want to walk even faster. I was glad when we reached the parking lot.

We hadn't expected to find Burt waiting at the car. We had said goodbye to him in the recreation room, and the idea was he'd play ping-pong with a man named Jackson. But I supposed he followed us and saw we were going in for the interview. Or maybe he took a walk and noticed the car still parked. He was leaning against a fender, and on the ground he had an empty water bucket and a sponge and some rags. He had washed the car.

"You shouldn't have done that," I said.

"I didn't have anything better to do. It sure was filthy."

"I thought you were going to play ping-pong."

"We played a set. I saw your name on the nurse's interview list."

"I was going to wash the car tomorrow. All that mud from last week."

He ran his hand over the hood. "You're about ready for a paint job," he said.

"I'm about ready for a new car."

"Thinking of another Chevvy?"

"Thinking is as far as I've got. This one'll have to do me for another twenty thousand. Maybe prices will come down a little by then."

"I see more new cars pulling in here every month," Burt said. "I like the looks of the new Cadillac."

"That'll be the day," I said.

He was all through talking about cars. He said, "What's the pitch, Lou?"

"He thought you were getting better. He sounded as if he'd spent some time with you."

"He has. Getting better? Is that how he put it?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's always nice to hear good news about yourself."

"It was awful sweet of you to wash the car," said Betty, "but really, you shouldn't have done it. We thought you were going to play ping-pong."

"I was. This Jackson couldn't return anything. The only decent partner I had out here was a little girl used to be in the Waves. And she went Asiatic as hell. They got her in a strait jacket now. That's where this Jackson's going to end up if he thinks he can play ping-pong. How about you, Lou, will you be up to a few fast sets next Sunday?"

"Sure. I'll take you, too."

"That'll be the day," he said. He smiled. Burt can talk like that and look like that, no different from the way he looked and talked in the summer of '43 when our division was resting comfortably in Melbourne, Australia, and he had the prettiest girl of anyone in the platoon. In all that time, I can't see where his appearance has changed at all. He weighs the same and he smiles the same and he has no new lines in his face, which is more than I can say. I've never yet managed to beat him in a set of ping-pong, and I've tried.

"Darling, I wish we could stay and eat with you," Betty said. "But the baby-sitter has to leave at six."

He held the door of the car open, and rubbed a last smudge off a fender with his sleeve. Burt can be just like that.

It's little over an hour's drive from the hospital to our place. The Sunday traffic was heavy, but mostly in the other direction.

"What was the doctor getting at," I asked, "with all those numbers?"

"Which numbers?"

"About all the patients that don't get visited."

"I think he was trying to find out how badly we want Burt to come home," Betty said.

"He should have talked up and asked me."

"What would you have told him?"

"Just what I've told you. Burt's got to have his chance now."

"Not now," she said. "Not while he's still having attacks. I couldn't take it. Not with the children in the house."

"Maybe if he came home, he wouldn't get scared. If instead of being in that place, he had us around him."

"Us and the children. No. Lou, you haven't seen one of those panics. He whimpers. He crawls under the table and whimpers. The baby wouldn't know what it was all about, but the other two would be terrified, just as I was, the first time. You keep saying maybe this, maybe that. We can't go experimenting around with the children's lives."

"What about Burt's life?"

"Or with Burt's life, either. You heard what the doctor said. If Burt had to be committed again, it would be that much worse."

"So the deal is to let him rot in there."

"Burt isn't rotting," Betty said. "This doctor isn't like the others. He's been spending time with Burt. He'll let us know when Burt is ready."

"Burt is the same now as he was three years ago. The same as he'll be three years from now unless we do something. There were men worse off than Burt on Pavuvu, but once they got home, they worked out of it."

"You don't know anything about how Burt is. If you haven't seen one of those attacks, you can't know."

"Can't I? There must be a reason why he doesn't have attacks around me."

"Maybe there is," she said. "Maybe he'd stay perfectly sane all the time you were around. That would take care of the evenings. That would leave only the daytime for me to look after him and the children. To be hanging diapers in the back and wondering what goes on in the house. Or are you thinking of changing places?"

"Changing places?"

"You could stay home with him," she said. "I could get a job. I wouldn't earn as much as you right off, but I bet I could after a while."

That was as near as I ever got to striking Betty. Driving the car and not slapping her mouth were all I could manage at one and the same time. There wasn't any of me left over to answer her.

"Oh, darling," she said. "I love you so. Please don't let's fight."

"I'm not fighting."

"I love him, too. I wouldn't hesitate a minute if you and I were alone. Honest, it's not me. Honest, it's the children. I plain can't see myself trying to handle the four of them. Not if he had an attack. I wouldn't have the strength. Not day in, day out, with the babies around. Every time it rained, every time he got started talking about those places, I'd wonder what was coming next and how to keep the children from seeing it. Couldn't we get him a room with some good people in the village, and I could run over and see him, and you could spend time with him evenings? Shouldn't we ask the doctor about that?"

"No."

I didn't say anything more all the rest of the way home, or if I did, I don't remember what. She surely got to me with that crack about money, because it's true. Betty has her high-school teaching certificate and she could step into a pretty well-paying job almost any time. She had her certificate even before we got married, and our first plans were to settle down in Arizona and for her to teach and for me and Burt to run a dude ranch. That was only one of many plans but it was the one we kept coming back to. I'd still like to see my children grow up in Arizona.

"He was such a wonderful boy," she said. "The most wonderful boy in the world. When other boys chased their little sisters away, somehow he always managed it so I could stick around."

At home, Betty and I got to feeling better. The baby was down for the night, and Mrs. Lehner, from across the road, had Chris and Nina in the bathtub. We paid Mrs. Lehner and let her go. Watching Chris and Nina in the water, we got to feeling better. Any time a man and his wife don't get to feeling better when they see their kids in the tub, they had best head for the nearest divorce court. After we'd hung around the bathroom longer than we should have, Betty read Chris his bedtime story and I sang Nina her bedtime songs, and we had our supper out of the refrigerator.

If on the day we got married, less than six years ago, someone had told us we'd have three children, one after the other, I wonder if we would have gone through with it. We'd have been crazy if we hadn't. This is the way we want it, but I don't know if you could have convinced us of that in the summer of '44.

I was fresh back in the States with a medical discharge, healthy as a horse except for a trick knee that hasn't given me any real trouble since. I had Betty's address from Burt and looked her up as soon as I could. Five days after we met, I asked her to marry me, and she only took about a week making up her mind. We sent Burt the announcement. He didn't answer, and that was the first we knew that something had gone wrong. I had left him in pretty good shape on Pavuvu, but by the time I reached Stateside, they had him in the Navy mobile hospital on Banika. I'd put in a couple of weeks in that hospital myself, with my knee. There were more than fifty thousand men on Banika at that time, and less than a hundred American women—nurses and Red Cross girls, who lived behind a barbed-wire stockade and could leave it only under armed M.P. escort. Betty believed me when I told her about the stockade, but she thought I was piling it on a bit about the M.P.s.

I've always had a little trouble trying to tell Betty how things were out there, I mean in the order they happened. She has asked me more than once to explain how Burt could have gone through the really rough months on Guadalcanal and then cracked wide open after the short blitz on Cape Gloucester, where our casualties were light, and a few weeks of Pavuvu, which was supposed to be a rest camp. She'll listen to me and look like she understands, and after a while she'll ask the same question again. I guess when you've spent twenty years looking up to your big brother, who's tougher and smarter and nicer than anybody else's big brother, it's hard to let go of the idea.

Once, she said, "But why didn't *you* crack?"

The answer, which didn't come to me at the time, is that I did. We all did, but some of us managed to keep it to ourselves.

The rains came down heavy on Cape Gloucester. The monsoon broke as we landed, the day after Christmas, and from then on we stayed wet through the whole operation, wet to the skin. I don't know how to describe it. The whole jungle turned into muck, from the forest roof down to the swamp underfoot. Your equipment would bog down, and while you'd be struggling to get it loose, miles from any Jap, a rotten tree would crash and kill the man in front of you. The wallet in your pocket turned bright blue with mold and so did your boondockers. If you had a pencil, it came apart at the seams. The blades of your pocketknife rusted together. Letters and pictures you had carried for a year rotted into a pulp after the first two days.

I don't know how to explain it. On Guadalcanal, except for the two lousiest days of naval shelling, you could fight back at somebody, or at least think about fighting back. Once in a while, you might get to the rear and take a swim in the Lunga. On Cape Gloucester, our outfit had nothing to fight back at most of the time. I don't say it was worse than Guadalcanal or that I'd rather fight Japs than the humidity. But there's a kind of discouragement that gets to you. You couldn't even smoke your tobacco without getting sick.

Burt stood up as well as anybody. Better, I thought. He had a patch of jungle rot in one of his armpits, but we all had something. He and I tried to keep warm at night by sleeping together, with one poncho above us and one below. We slept right through some "Condition Red" sirens and talked right through some others. I don't remember anything peculiar about his talk. He told me a lot about his girl in Melbourne, but not in any peculiar way. He was thinking he might marry her and bring her to the States. That's when we first talked about running a dude ranch. He said his girl could cook for any number of people. The next day, he killed a Jap at long range, with a rifle, one of the cleanest shots I ever saw.

Everything I could remember about Burt I've told to one or another of his doctors. They keep asking me about Pavuvu, and I've told them. I don't know if they get it when I say we were all of us queer on Pavuvu, more or less. Asiatic, we called it. After Gloucester, we had all thought we'd be shipped back to Melbourne, and they sent us to Pavuvu instead. The way they happened to do that I found out only last year, when we got sent copies of the division history, with a picture of General Vandegrift in front.

Betty says there is no such place as Pavuvu listed in any dictionary or atlas. Maybe so. But it's a real island, all right, about sixty miles from Guadalcanal, and it looked good to the staff officers of the III Amphibious Corps. They flew over the island and saw all the pretty palm trees in rows, and they thought it would be just the place for our division to rest and get reorganized. They were wrong.

The mud on Pavuvu was as deep as any we'd seen and it smelled worse. On our company street, which we had cleared ourselves, a jeep bogged down so you couldn't see the tops of the tires. The rainy season didn't know it was supposed to be over. And the first dry night we had, a rat gnawed its way through Burt's mosquito net and took a nip out of his ear. We fought those rats and the land crabs all the time we were on Pavuvu. And sometimes we got up at night to fight rats that weren't there.

As I told one of Burt's doctors, why go on about it? Everybody claims his outfit had the roughest time of all, just like everybody had the toughest first sergeant in the Corps. One fellow started chopping down a couple of palm trees because, he said, they shut off his view of the Southern Cross. Nobody stopped him. Another man, a corporal, said that if you could prove you'd been made impotent by Atabrine, you could get rotated back to the States. Well, that was a crazy thing to say, but nobody thought of asking a doctor to look the man over. The man kept his stripes, and after Peleliu he got another, so he must have done his job all right. Burt never said anything as crazy as that. He was no queerer than the rest of us, at that time. I don't know what cracked him up so soon after I left. All I know is, if it could happen to him, it could have happened to me. Inside, I had cracked as bad as Burt, or worse, but I was lucky and no one noticed.

I have never once visited Burt without thinking how easily it could be me in there. That may have been one reason why I blew up at Betty after that session with the doctor a week ago. I blew up at her again on Friday, when she suggested that it might be a good thing if Burt was taken to a hospital in another part of the country, where it doesn't rain so much. She said if the doctor had it right, if rain really got Burt down, Arizona or New Mexico might be a better place. But I thought she was trying to get him farther away from us, so we wouldn't have to visit every week. That was in line with her idea that it might not be helping Burt to see me so often, because I reminded him of Gloucester and Pavuvu. So I blew and we had to patch things up again. Today, though, she fixed some apricot tarts for him, the kind their mother used to make.

I was glad it rained today, because it would give me a chance to show that the doctor had been wrong about Burt. I had spent rainy Sundays there before, and Burt hadn't gone whimpering under any tables. What I wanted was to have the doctor spend a couple of hours just talking it over with Burt and me, and see if we couldn't get somewhere that way. But I found another doctor on duty, and the nurse told me that our regular man wouldn't be around for several days. She said I'd find Burt in the ward; they weren't letting him roam when it rained this hard. I could take him to the recreation room, she said, and that's what I did.

We settled in some wicker chairs near a window. I opened the box and showed him the apricot tarts. Burt didn't want any. He said he hadn't eaten his lunch, either. No appetite. I started to eat one of the tarts myself, thinking that would make him want them. Betty had packed six.

"These are good," I said.

"I bet," he said. But he made no move to take one.

One of the patients, an old man with white hair, stopped in front of us and looked inside the box. "Mmm," he said. "That's what I call cookies."

I was going to offer him one, but Burt said, "Beat it, Larkin. I'm telling you, beat it."

The old man laughed and backed away. At the door, he stuck his middle finger up in the air, and laughed again.

"Semper Fi," Burt said.

That wasn't like Burt. In the Marines, when you said Semper Fi, it meant The hell with you, Jack, I got mine. I hadn't heard anyone say Semper Fi for years. It wasn't like Burt not to share food with anybody any time. He looked nervous.

"Want to play some ping-pong?" I asked him.

"Not now. The guy's just a moocher. Wouldn't give you the time of day. What time is it?"

"Ten after three."

"My watch rusted up on me. I paid eighty dollars for it in Melbourne, and it's shot. It was supposed to be waterproof."

"I can have it repaired."

He shook his head. "I'm telling you it's shot. I threw it away."

"I might've been able to get it fixed."

"No. Once they get rusted up like that . . . Can I see yours?"

I handed him my watch.

"Can I keep this one?" he asked.

"Well, it's the only one I got."

"But I wish I could keep it. You can buy another. I'll give you the money."

"All right, Burt," I said. "It's not much of a timepiece."

He handed it back to me. "What the hell do I need a watch for? In weather like this. It would only rust up on me."

He had acted like that with Betty, but never with me.

I said, "You want to play some ping-pong now?"

"O.K."

I started across the room to hang my raincoat.

"Your belt's dragging," he said.

The belt was rolled up in my coat pocket. "Where do you see any belt?" I said.

He was looking at the floor. "Those ammo belts are dragging on the ground," he said. "You'll get the goddam receiver full of mud."

"Where do you see the machine gun?" I asked. "Show me where it is. Let me get ahold of it, Burt. Hand it to me."

Without looking at me, he walked to the window. I didn't want to follow him just then. I thought maybe he'd come out of it by himself. I went across the room and hung my coat. By the time I turned around, Burt was sitting under one of the ping-pong tables, with his knees pulled up to his chin. I went back and squatted down near him. His face was white, and he looked straight at the floor. I had to say something. I said, "What're you looking for?"

He turned his face toward me. "Just taking a break. I'm all right. You all right, Lou?"

"Sure."

"You all right?"

"I'm fine."

"You got an extra pair of socks?"

"Plenty of socks," I said.

"Tell the goddam swabbie to dig his own goddam hole. He got no business up here. Go on, tell him."

"Show me the swabbie, Burt. Let me see him. You come and we'll both tell him."

"Look out!" he yelled. "Get down!" He gave the regulation hand signal to hit the dirt, and threw himself flat on the floor.

As I heard him yell and saw him go down, my knees started to shake in a way they had shaken only once before, back on Gloucester when I thought I saw a sniper looking at me through the lianas, and I had only a pair of pants on, no weapons. The Jap turned out to be nothing but a man-shaped piece of hanging moss. On Gloucester, the fear had started in my stomach and drained down to my knees, into the bone, and the same thing happened there in the recreation room. If I hadn't been squatting anyway, I think my legs might have buckled under me. For a moment there, the hand signal and the sound of Burt's voice almost had me hitting the floor.

Somebody tapped my shoulder. It was the nurse on duty. She said, "If you leave him alone, you'll find he comes out of it faster."

"Go on, tell him," Burt said. "I don't want his goddam socks."

I obeyed the nurse, and now I'm sorry. I should have stayed there and tried to talk him out of it. Maybe I could have done just that, talked him out of it.

The nurse went back to her desk. I didn't follow her all the way. I sat on the edge of the table where I'd left the apricot tarts, and I didn't take my eyes off Burt. He put his head down between his knees and made a kind of whinnying noise. He stayed there about ten or fifteen long minutes but he never repeated the sound. Then he crawled toward the window on his hands and knees. When he reached the wall, he stood up and went back to the ping-pong table. He picked up one of the paddles and started bouncing a ball on the linoleum floor. I went over to him.

"You all right?" he said.

"I'm fine."

"Want to play?"

He still looked very pale. I didn't see what harm it could do to play a little. He beat me in that first set, 21-14, and I was doing my best. He didn't mention what had happened until he had beaten me in four or five more sets, each time by a wider margin. He didn't say a word, not even as we changed sides.

Have you ever seen a mechanic at work on the wires of a switchboard? Watching Burt this afternoon was like his nerves had been taken apart and laid out on a bench and he had to reassemble them one by one. He never stopped working. Between the sets of ping-pong, his fists stayed clenched so the knuckles were as white as his face. While he played, he kept his eyes on the ball and smashed it every chance he got. And just before I left, it looked as if he had himself put together again, because he laughed, sort of, and said, "Did you see me duck under? I still get a little scared once in a while." He ate one of Betty's tarts, without being urged. I told him there was nothing to be scared of. He said, "I know. I'm not scared now." I didn't tell him that all the time he was under the table, I was scared, too, thinking Oh Christ, how easily I could be under there with him, oh Christ, if on Pavuvu I had gone to the chaplain or the doctor and told them just half the things that were going through my mind, they would have put me away and now I'd be under the table with Burt.

When I got home, I found Betty upstairs, with Chris and Nina having their bath, just like last Sunday. They were splashing around in the water and squealing. Chris was using his squirt gun on Nina, and she didn't seem to mind in the least. They're nice-looking kids. I guess I'd think so even if they weren't, but they are. They look so shiny and new. Chris has lost all his baby fat and he's a little boy now, with shoulders and hard belly.

After all that roughhouse in the tub, I had a time getting Nina down in bed. She kept throwing the covers off and asking for more and more songs. She asked to be picked up and rocked. So I picked her up and rocked her until she fell asleep with her head on my shoulder. That's where Burt finally lost out, not in the talk I later had with Betty.

Talking with Betty, I still insisted that Burt ought to have his chance now, but my mind had already been changed. Burt is not going to live in the same house with Chris and Nina. I know that lousy hospital is doing him more harm than he could do the children, but they're my children, and so I'm going to let him rot in there.

When the time comes and the doctor asks if we're ready, I'll weasel my way out of it somehow. I still think I'm the one man who could help Burt, because I've been where he is now and I've covered the road back. I could help him but I won't and I know exactly what that makes me.

I won't pretend it's all for the sake of wife and kiddies. I don't want Burt around me, either. I've got my own wires put together so they're pretty straight now, and I don't want to hear any more about Cape Gloucester than I have to. I want to spend my evenings in the house alone with Chris who has never seen a rat, and Nina who has never heard of a land crab, and Betty who can stand rainy weather, and the baby who may not ever get to meet his Uncle Burt. Semper Fi is about the size of it—the hell with you, Jack, I got mine. Pull up the ladder, mate, I'm aboard.

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